ALTIS 1984

Strengths by Strengths do Fail

Campaign Guide

Third World Troubles Volume I

ALTIS 1984

Strengths by Strengths do Fail

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The island of Altis, 1984.

And power, unto itself most commendable,
Hath not a tomb so evident as a chair
To extol what it hath done.
One fire drives out one fire; one nail, one nail;
Rights by rights falter, strengths by strengths do fail.
Come, let's away. When, Caius, Rome is thine,
Thou art poor'st of all; then shortly art thou mine.

William Shakespeare, Coriolanus

INTRODUCTION

On 24 April 1975, several vehicles of the 5th Brigade, Altis National Guard, entered the village of Infestiona. The unit had been sent to investigate reports from local inhabitants. During the previous few days, armed men had been seen unloading trucks on the outskirts of the village.

The 5th Brigade was composed largely of FIA members. During the previous month it had received similar reports and had carried out about a dozen combat sorties. Only one of these had resulted in the discovery of a small weapons cache. For this reason, the movement into Infestiona was initially treated as another search operation.

Immediately after the column entered the village, the lead pick-up was hit by an RPG round and caught fire on the road. Men of the 5th Brigade opened scattered fire at the surrounding houses, but failed to locate the RPG team. During the first two minutes, while the soldiers were trying to orient themselves, the column came under coordinated small-arms fire. APLA firing positions were located inside residential buildings and behind stone walls along the road. At the same time, a heavy machine gun opened fire on the vehicles and soldiers from a hill approximately 300-400 metres from the village.

Under fire from several directions, the 5th Brigade lost at least seven men killed and twelve wounded. The remaining soldiers loaded themselves into the only surviving truck and withdrew to Athira. Some weapons, equipment, and the bodies of the dead were left in the village.

Approximately forty minutes later, National Guard soldiers returned to Infestiona with reinforcements. By that time the APLA unit had left the village. The bodies of the dead soldiers of the 5th Brigade were found at the scene. All serviceable weapons, ammunition, radios, and individual equipment had been removed or taken by the insurgents. In the yard of a house near the road, the guardsmen found the bodies of two of their soldiers. Their hands had been tied behind their backs, and both had been killed by shots to the back of the head.

The engagement at Infestiona was the first recorded armed clash between organised insurgent forces and the security forces of Altis. On the same day, twelve attacks were recorded against army and National Guard facilities across the island, along with three convoy ambushes and two vehicle-borne explosive attacks. The attacks were carried out by APLA and ARF.

The Altis Civil War had begun.

Soldiers of the 5th Brigade guard detained residents of Infestiona, 24 April 1975.

REFUGEES, MILITIAS AND THE ENOSIS QUESTION

By the autumn of 1949, Altis was still a British colony, but its political life was already shaped by events outside the island. The end of the Greek Civil War did not end the movement of people across the Aegean. After 16 October 1949, the number of refugees arriving from Greece increased sharply. Some came as families. Others were former political activists, sympathisers of the defeated left, or men who had served in the Democratic Army of Greece. They arrived with few possessions, uncertain legal status, and no clear prospect of return.

The colonial authorities initially treated the refugee movement as a temporary problem. Camps and improvised settlements were established near the larger towns and ports, especially around Kavala and the eastern coast. In practice, the situation soon became political. Many of the new arrivals were associated, correctly or not, with the defeated communist side in Greece. Among them were former DAG fighters who had escaped capture and reached Altis by boat. A number of these men brought small arms with them or helped to move weapons through fishing ports and private landing places.

The scale of this traffic was limited, but its political effect was large. Rumours of hidden weapons spread quickly through the island. Local right-wing groups claimed that the Greek Civil War was being imported into Altis. Some of these claims were exaggerated, but they reflected a real fear among landowners, conservative town notables, anti-communist veterans, and sections of the colonial police. For many of them, the presence of armed former DAG men was not seen as a refugee problem, but as the beginning of an organised revolutionary network.

It was in this atmosphere that FIA began to expand from a political and veterans' association into a street movement. At this stage FIA was not yet the formal power it would become in later decades. It was a local right-wing and anti-communist organisation, drawing support from former servicemen, conservative youth groups, port workers, and small landowners. Its leaders presented the movement as a defence organisation created to protect Altis from communist infiltration. In practice, FIA units began to perform functions that belonged to the colonial police.

Fighters of the Democratic Army of Greece during the Greek Civil War, 1948.

Demonstration of Greek refugees in Aggelochori. The placard reads: "When a people faces the danger of tyranny, it chooses either chains or weapons."

During the final weeks of October and the first days of November, FIA groups appeared in the streets of Kavala, Athira and several port settlements. They stopped vehicles, questioned refugees, blocked access to docks, and announced unofficial curfews in districts where they had support. These measures had no clear legal basis. They were not an official island-wide emergency system, and they did not replace British authority. Their strength depended on local influence, numbers, and the willingness of police officers or colonial officials to ignore them.

The British administration did not formally recognise FIA as an armed force. Private militias remained illegal under colonial law. At the same time, the authorities often treated FIA as a useful instrument against the left. In several towns, colonial police allowed FIA patrols to operate as long as they did not openly challenge British authority. Some local officials maintained contacts with FIA organisers and used them as informants or intermediaries. This created a semi-legal position in which FIA could deny responsibility for violence while continuing to control streets and ports in areas where it was strong.

Former DAG fighters and their supporters responded by organising their own protection groups. These groups were smaller and less visible than FIA, but they were often better armed and more disciplined. Their main purpose was to defend refugee districts, protect warehouses and meeting places, and prevent FIA patrols from entering areas where left-wing refugees had settled. By early November, both sides had men under arms, local chains of command, and lists of suspected enemies. The British authorities still hoped to contain the situation through policing, but the conditions for armed clashes already existed.

Several incidents took place in the first half of November. Most were brief exchanges of fire, assaults on individual activists, or attempts to seize weapons. Ports became the main point of tension. FIA accused DAG networks of using fishing boats to bring weapons onto the island. DAG representatives accused FIA of using port blockades to intimidate refugees and prevent food, clothing and medical supplies from reaching the camps. The colonial police lacked the manpower to inspect every vessel and did not fully control the armed groups operating around the docks.

British soldiers on the streets of Pyrgos, November 1949.

FIA militants in Kavala during the events later known as Black Friday, 11 November 1949.

The best-known incident of this period was the street fighting in Kavala on 11 November 1949, later remembered as Black Friday. The immediate cause remains disputed. FIA accounts claimed that a patrol had been fired on while searching for weapons near the port district. DAG sources stated that FIA men had attempted to detain two refugees and were confronted by armed guards from a nearby safe house. Whatever the first shot, the incident developed into a firefight in the streets around the market and the lower road to the harbour.

The fighting lasted less than an hour, but it involved several groups on both sides. Pistols, rifles and at least one light automatic weapon were used. Civilians were caught in the streets before the colonial police could seal the area. By the time British troops and police units restored control, eleven people had been killed: two members of DAG, five members of FIA, and four civilians. Several more were wounded. The casualty figures were small when compared with the war in Greece, but on Altis they had a major political effect. Black Friday demonstrated that the island had armed factions capable of fighting in public and that the colonial administration could no longer rely on informal arrangements.

After the fighting in Kavala, the British authorities introduced military patrols in the main towns and around the ports. Army detachments were deployed at road junctions, public buildings and harbour entrances. Curfews announced by FIA were declared illegal, and public carrying of weapons was prohibited. At the same time, the governor’s office opened contacts with representatives of FIA, DAG-linked refugee committees, clerical leaders and local political figures. The purpose was not to resolve the political divisions on the island, but to prevent the November violence from developing into a wider conflict.

The result was the Gravia Agreement, signed on 12 December 1949. The agreement was limited in scope, but important in effect. The parties accepted that they would not use violence to impose political demands, intimidate communities, control streets, or interfere with the movement of people and goods. FIA and DAG-linked organisations were required to transfer their public activity into legal political structures. In return, the British governor guaranteed that these movements would be allowed to operate openly, provided that they accepted colonial law and surrendered weapons held outside authorised channels.

The agreement did not disarm every man on the island. It did, however, create a framework in which political organisations could exist without maintaining visible armed patrols. FIA was allowed to develop as a legal right-wing movement rather than as an unofficial militia. DAG-linked refugee committees were permitted to act as political and social organisations representing the interests of the new arrivals. Both sides kept their networks and their memories of the November violence. The conflict was not ended; it was moved from the street into political life.

One of the most practical parts of the Gravia Agreement concerned the ports. The British authorities understood that the question of arms smuggling could not be solved by promises alone. New inspection groups were therefore established at the main harbours and selected smaller landing places. These groups were led by colonial police and British military personnel. Representatives of FIA and DAG-linked organisations were permitted to serve as observers or liaison officers, but they did not control the inspections. This arrangement allowed each side to monitor the process and reduced accusations that the other was secretly importing weapons.

The port inspections also restored a degree of British control. They limited the ability of FIA to impose its own blockades and reduced the capacity of DAG networks to move arms through informal channels. The system was imperfect and depended heavily on local commanders, but it helped to reduce the immediate risk of further armed clashes. By late December 1949, large-scale street patrols had largely ended, and the main refugee districts were no longer being entered by FIA groups without police supervision.

Once the threat of immediate violence had declined, the question of Altis's political future returned. The events of 1949 had taken place in the shadow of the wider Greek crisis, and many local politicians believed that the island had to define its position. Following the example of Cyprus, Altis held an unofficial referendum on enosis between 12 and 15 January 1950. The vote was not recognised as a binding constitutional act by the British authorities, but it was permitted to proceed as an expression of public opinion.

The result was clear. According to the organisers, 82.4 per cent of respondents voted against union with Greece. The figure surprised some outside observers, but it reflected the political situation on the island after the refugee crisis. Many DAG refugees had no desire to pass under the authority of the Greek state from which they had fled. The British administration also preferred an anti-enosis result and did little to encourage support for union. Among the local population, fear of importing the Greek Civil War into Altis remained strong. Even many right-wing Altians, including supporters of FIA, were anti-communist without being willing to accept direct subordination to Athens.

The vote also had another consequence. Under the terms agreed at Gravia, refugees were allowed to take part in the referendum. This did not immediately make them full citizens, but it marked the first step towards the legal recognition of the new communities on the island. In later years, the status of these refugees and their descendants would remain one of the central issues in Altian politics.

The crisis of 1949–50 therefore ended without a colonial civil war, but it left a lasting structure behind it. FIA emerged as a legal right-wing force with a history of street mobilisation. DAG-linked refugee organisations survived as political and social networks. The British authorities retained control, but only by recognising groups that had recently taken part in armed confrontation. Altis avoided open war in 1949. It did not remove the conditions that could produce one later.

A British patrol during clashes on Altis, November 1949.

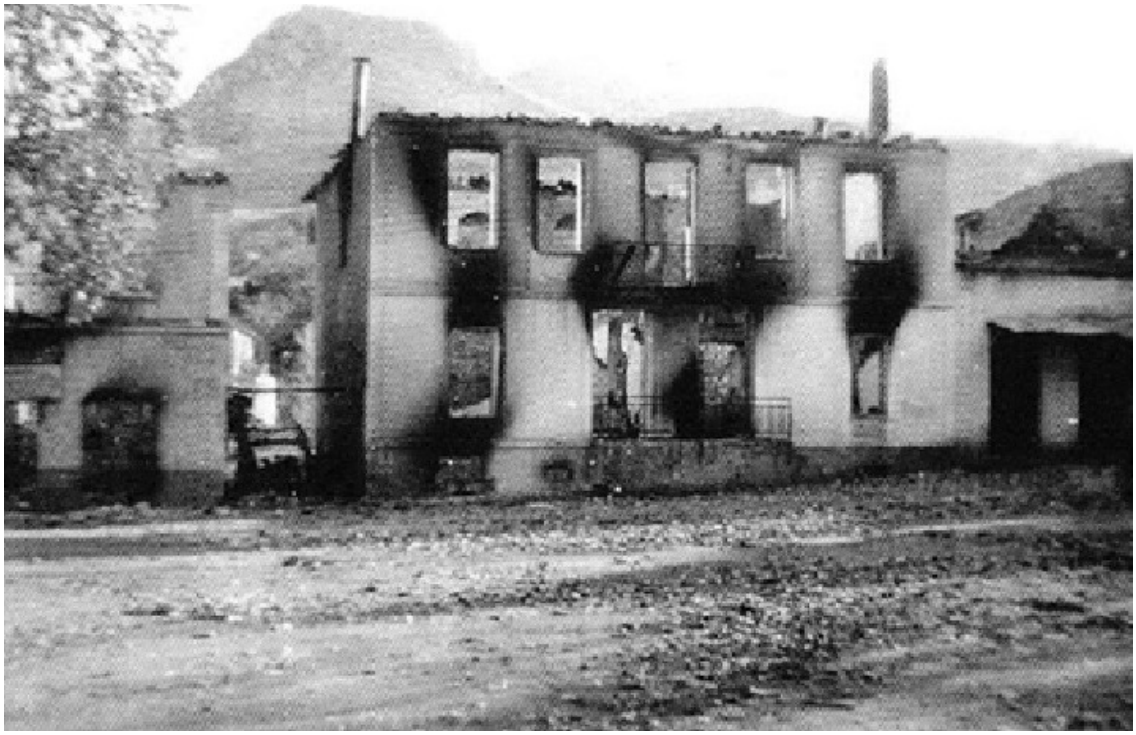
FROM MILITIAS TO PARTIES, 1950–1960

After the Gravia Agreement, political violence on Altis did not disappear, but it changed form. The armed organisations that had appeared during the refugee crisis of 1949 were pushed out of the streets and into legal politics. FIA was dissolved as an armed movement and its organisers entered public life through Right Cause, a right-wing party built around anti-communism, public order and Altian self-government. The former DAG networks did not survive as a single organisation. During the early 1950s they divided into two political currents: the Communist Party of Altis and the Social Democratic Movement.

This transformation was encouraged by the British governor's office. The colonial authorities understood that a direct ban on both camps would probably drive them underground again. Instead, the administration allowed the new parties to publish newspapers, hold meetings, form local committees and compete in municipal politics. In return, they were expected to avoid armed mobilisation and to accept police control of public demonstrations. The arrangement did not remove the divisions created in 1949, but it gave their leaders something to lose. Legal status, offices, printing presses and electoral access became more valuable than street patrols.

Right Cause inherited much of FIA's social base. Its support was strongest among conservative town notables, former servicemen, small landowners, port workers and sections of the colonial police. The party presented itself as the defender of order and Altian autonomy. It remained strongly anti-communist, but it was not simply an enosis movement. For many of its supporters, Altian nationalism meant self-rule and the creation of a separate Altian state, not direct subordination to Athens. This position helped Right Cause appeal to voters who identified culturally with Greece but did not want the island to become part of the Greek state.

The left was more divided. The Communist Party of Altis drew support from former DAG fighters, refugee districts and parts of the urban working class. It maintained links with veterans' circles and mutual-aid committees, but its legal leadership avoided open calls for armed struggle. The Social Democratic Movement attracted moderate leftists, trade-union organisers, teachers and younger activists who wanted reform without returning to the conditions of the Greek Civil War. Both parties competed for influence among refugees and workers, and their rivalry prevented the left from becoming a single disciplined bloc.



The newspaper building, burned down after the attack. Neochori, 1951.

Between 1950 and 1955, the political system remained fragile. Former fighters on both sides kept personal weapons, and some local groups continued to act outside party control. The most serious incidents were limited in scale. A left-wing newspaper office in Neochori was attacked by masked men in 1951. A trade-union warehouse near Agia Triada was burned the following year. In 1953, former militants exchanged fire near a small harbour after a dispute over suspected arms smuggling. In 1954, a crude explosive device was found near a colonial police building before it detonated. The killing of a local activist in 1955 led to several days of tension, but Right Cause, the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Movement all publicly condemned the attack.

These incidents showed that the legacy of 1949 had not been removed. They also showed the limits of radical action. None of the major parties wished to be blamed for a return to militia politics. Each public outbreak of violence allowed the governor to threaten restrictions, arrests and the closure of party offices. As a result, the legal leaderships usually cooperated with investigations, denied responsibility for unauthorised groups, and presented themselves as barriers against disorder. This gave the British administration an important lever over all sides.

The contrast with Cyprus became clear after 1955. While Cyprus entered a period of armed anti-colonial struggle, Altis did not follow the same path. Enosis had already been weakened by the referendum of January 1950 and by the growth of a separate Altian political identity. Many refugees opposed union with Greece because they had fled the Greek state. Many right-wing Altians opposed communism without wanting to be ruled from Athens. Clerical leaders, local businessmen and municipal politicians also preferred a settlement that preserved their position inside an autonomous Altian framework. By the mid-1950s, the main political question on the island was no longer whether Altis should join Greece, but what kind of independent Altis would emerge.

The governor’s policy was based on containment. Public demonstrations were allowed, but armed marches were not. Party newspapers were tolerated, but direct incitement to violence could lead to closure. Port inspections continued in modified form, mainly to prevent the import of weapons and to reassure both political camps that the other side was not preparing for war. British patrols remained visible in periods of tension, but the administration increasingly relied on negotiations with party leaders, church figures, trade-union representatives and municipal councils.

By the end of the decade, the political forces born from the crisis of 1949 had become permanent features of Altian life. Right Cause had replaced FIA as the legal expression of the anti-communist right. The Communist Party and the Social Democratic Movement had divided the former DAG constituency between revolutionary and reformist politics. Radical violence continued at the margins, but it no longer defined the island’s political system. Altis had not solved its internal conflicts. It had contained them long enough for independence to become possible.

Following the settlement of the Cyprus question, Britain moved towards a similar transfer of power on Altis. On 23 September 1960, one month and one week after Cyprus became independent, Altis received its own independence. The new state inherited a functioning party system, but also the unresolved divisions that had produced it.

The last British troops ceremonially leave Altis, October 1960.

The 1960 Elections

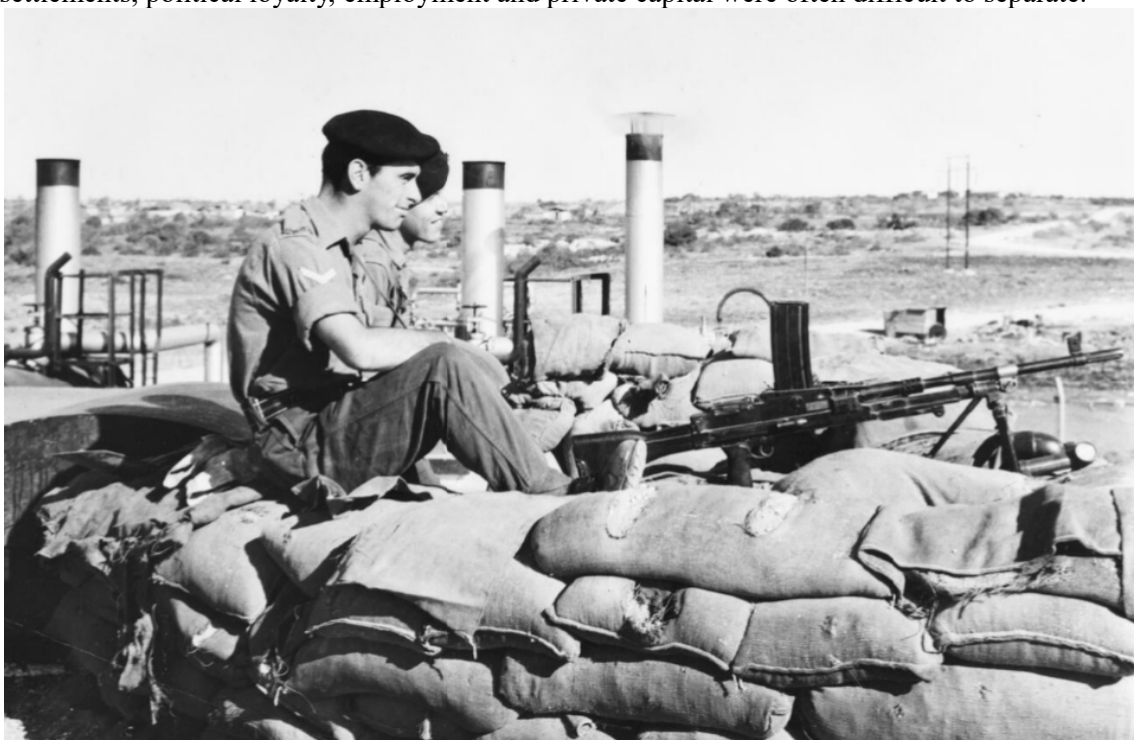
Altis became independent on 23 September 1960, one month and one week after Cyprus. The new state inherited the institutions prepared during the final years of British rule, but its political system was still incomplete. The constitution created a parliamentary republic in which the prime minister was appointed by parliament. This made party organisation more important than any single presidential figure and gave the first elections a decisive role in defining the new state.

The first parliamentary elections were held at the end of September 1960. British soldiers were still present on the island and were used to secure polling stations, government buildings and the main roads around Kavala, Athira and Pyrgos. Their presence prevented major violence, but it also allowed defeated parties to claim that the election had been conducted under foreign pressure. Left-wing newspapers later described the vote as the “last act of colonial administration”, while Right Cause presented it as the first legal mandate of independent Altis.

The official result gave Right Cause a narrow victory as the largest party. In the 100-seat parliament, Right Cause won 31 seats. The Communist Party of Altis won 16, the Social Democratic Movement 15, and the Movement of Democratic Socialists 8. The Liberal Party won 13 seats, Altian Solution 9, and the Union of Centrists 8. The result did not give Right Cause an absolute majority, but it allowed Kostas Vakardis to form a government with the Liberals, Altian Solution and most of the Centrists.

The opposition accused Right Cause of intimidation in several industrial districts and of irregularities in refugee settlements around Katalaki, Poliakko and Alikampos. There were also complaints that polling stations near ports and factories linked to Vakardis had been placed under pressure by local employers. No investigation overturned the result. For the British authorities, the main objective had been a peaceful transfer of power, and the formation of a government was treated as proof that independence had been completed successfully.

Kostas Vakardis became the first prime minister of independent Altis. He was not only a party leader, but also one of the island’s most important industrialists. His family interests included production facilities in Athira, the port at Agia Triada, factories near Paros and Kalochori, and industrial property near Agios Dionysios. This made his government closely tied to the economic geography of the island from the beginning. In Athira and its surrounding settlements, political loyalty, employment and private capital were often difficult to separate.



British troops guard the road near Delfinaki during the first parliamentary elections, September 1960.

The Vakardis Government

Between 1960 and 1964, the Vakardis government gave Altis a period of visible growth. The new administration presented itself as pro-Western, anti-communist and open to foreign capital. Vakardis used his contacts in Western Europe and among AFMC member states to attract industrial and tourist investment. New hotel projects were planned around Iraklia and the eastern coast, port facilities were expanded, and several manufacturing sites received foreign equipment and technical assistance.

The armed forces also benefited from this policy. The Altis Army, still small and dependent on inherited British equipment, began to receive Western weapons, vehicles and communications systems. Training missions and procurement contracts gave the officer corps new foreign links. For many officers, Vakardis represented stability, order and access to modern equipment. This relationship between the government, the army and Western suppliers would remain one of the foundations of right-wing influence in the state.

The economic programme produced results, but it also created a system of patronage. Contracts were often awarded to companies connected to Right Cause or to businessmen close to Vakardis. Opposition deputies accused the government of using state funds to strengthen private monopolies. The prime minister was repeatedly linked to land deals, port concessions and construction contracts. These scandals damaged his reputation, but they did not immediately threaten his position. Many voters accepted corruption as the price of employment, new roads, better ports and visible development.

The main weakness of the Vakardis government was social policy. Refugee communities remained poorly integrated. Many families that had arrived after the Greek Civil War still lived in overcrowded districts or in settlements with limited access to services. Youth unemployment remained high, especially in towns where the new industrial projects did not absorb the local population. The government treated these problems as matters of order, not as questions of citizenship and reconstruction.

This was partly a political choice. Many refugee districts voted for the Communist Party, the Social Democratic Movement or the Movement of Democratic Socialists. In Right Cause circles they were still associated with the former DAG networks and with the violence of 1949. Vakardis had little interest in turning these communities into equal partners in the new republic. His government preferred selective assistance, police monitoring and local patronage to large-scale integration.

Construction of the stadium near Mount Magos, 1962.

The Social Question

By the early 1960s, the political map of Altis had become more defined. Katalaki, Poliakko and Alikampos were known as strongholds of the left because of their refugee populations and their links to former DAG committees. Charkia, with its small factory complex, became another centre of labour organisation. In these areas, the language of social rights, housing, citizenship and workers' protection carried more weight than the government's promises of investment.

Right Cause remained strongest in Athira and in the industrial and port settlements connected to Vakardis's interests. Agia Triada, Paros, Kalochori and the facilities near Agios Dionysios formed part of this economic network. Workers in these areas were not always ideological supporters of the right, but many depended on companies tied to Vakardis and his allies. The Liberal Party and Altian Solution also drew support from business circles, conservative professionals, church-linked organisations and local notables.

A third current existed in the interior and western highlands. Around Oreokastro and several smaller villages, republican and autonomist groups were suspicious of both the right-wing industrial bloc and the organised left. These groups did not yet form a major armed force, but they kept local networks, veterans' associations and contacts among municipal politicians. Their politics were anti-colonial, anti-corruption and strongly localist. In later years, this environment would become important for the growth of the Altis Republican Forces.

The unresolved refugee question remained the central issue. The left argued that the republic could not be stable while large parts of its population were treated as suspect communities. It called for housing programmes, full citizenship rights, expanded medical care, labour protections and state investment in neglected districts. The government replied that rapid reform would reward disloyal elements and damage the economic confidence on which independence depended.

This dispute shaped the campaign for the September 1964 elections. Right Cause campaigned on stability, foreign investment and anti-communism. The left campaigned on social reconstruction and the completion of citizenship for the communities left behind after 1949. The Liberals defended the investment model but tried to distance themselves from Vakardis's corruption scandals. Altian Solution focused on religion, family and public morality, while the Union of Centrists presented itself as the only force able to prevent another confrontation between right and left.

The result ended the first Vakardis government. Right Cause fell to 23 seats. The Liberal Party won 9, Altian Solution 8, and the Union of Centrists 7. The left, although still divided, won a parliamentary majority: the Social Democratic Movement took 23 seats, the Communist Party of Altis 18, and the Movement of Democratic Socialists 12. Together they controlled 53 seats and formed a coalition government.

House made of slate and metal sheets, Katalaki, 1963.

The Left Coalition

The new parliament appointed Dimitrios Papatsis as prime minister. Papatsis was acceptable to the main left-wing parties because he combined links to the former refugee networks with a reputation as a parliamentary organiser. He was not seen as a moderate by the right, but he was not simply a party militant. His government presented itself as the first administration that would govern for the workers, the refugees and the poor, rather than for port owners and industrial families.

The Papatsis government moved quickly. It expanded housing assistance for refugee communities, increased subsidies for basic goods, and began new school and clinic projects in neglected districts. It promised wider access to medical care and introduced measures intended to reduce the dependence of workers on private employers. Infrastructure plans focused on roads, water supply, public health and the integration of poorer settlements into the state system.

Foreign policy also changed. Papatsis did not break with the West, but he attempted to reduce dependence on Western capital and to bring Altis closer to the Non-Aligned Movement. His government opened economic and technical contacts with Eastern Bloc states and discussed military and industrial cooperation outside the previous Western framework. To supporters of the coalition, this was a policy of independence. To Right Cause and many army officers, it looked like the beginning of a strategic turn towards the communist bloc.

The reaction of investors was mixed. Some Western companies withdrew from projects approved under Vakardis, especially in construction, tourism and port development. Others remained, either because their investments were already too advanced or because the government offered new guarantees. The result was uncertainty rather than collapse. Capital did not leave Altis entirely, but it became more cautious. Credit became more expensive, and several major projects slowed.

Within the left coalition, the same policies produced disputes. Social democrats wanted reform without frightening foreign capital. Communists demanded faster nationalisation, stronger labour laws and closer ties with socialist states. The Movement of Democratic Socialists tried to hold the coalition together by supporting social spending while avoiding a complete break with private industry. Papatsis depended on all three groups, and every major decision required negotiation.

Workers' demonstration on Labour Day, Kavala, 1965.

Economic Strain and Political Heat

From 1964 to 1967, the government faced a growing wave of strikes and factory stoppages. Some were genuine labour actions encouraged by the new political climate. Workers who had been quiet under Vakardis now believed that the government would not use force against them. Demands for higher wages, safer conditions and recognition of unions spread through industrial districts around Charkia, Athira, Paros and Kalochori.

Other stoppages had a different character. Vakardis and his allies retained influence over employers, local managers and sections of the port economy. Several strikes began after delayed wages, sudden closures or disputes that appeared to be encouraged by factory owners themselves. Left-wing deputies accused Right Cause of organising economic sabotage to make the government look incapable of ruling. Right Cause denied this and claimed that the country was being destroyed by irresponsible spending and class agitation.

The government's tolerance of labour unrest weakened its authority. Police commanders complained that they had unclear instructions. Employers accused ministers of siding with workers. The army watched the situation with increasing concern, especially as the government discussed cooperation with Eastern Bloc suppliers while existing Western military contacts were being questioned. The officer corps did not yet act openly against the cabinet, but its confidence in parliamentary rule declined.

By the end of 1966, the state budget was under heavy strain. Social housing, medical programmes, subsidies, infrastructure work and refugee assistance had consumed far more money than expected. The government relied on credit to keep its projects moving. Inflation reached levels not seen since independence, and the cost of food and imported goods became a major political issue. For the poor, the government still represented protection. For the middle class, merchants and army officers, it increasingly represented disorder.

The political climate hardened. Right Cause newspapers described the government as a coalition of incompetents and former extremists. Left-wing papers accused Vakardis and his allies of trying to destroy the republic in order to return to power. The Liberal Party split between those who wanted compromise and those who believed the left had to be removed. Altian Solution and the Union of Centrists remained legal opposition parties, but both moved closer to demands for emergency measures and a restoration of order.

By early 1967, Altis had not yet entered open political violence, but the conditions for it were present. The first republic had survived independence, elections and the transfer of power between right and left. It had not produced a stable settlement between them. The right believed that the left was bankrupting the state and opening the door to communist influence. The left believed that the right was using capital, employers and sympathetic officers to reverse the 1964 election. The army increasingly viewed itself as the only institution capable of preventing collapse.

The events of 1967 would decide whether the parliamentary system could survive that pressure.

Altis army on maneuvers, 1966.

The Agia Triada Shipment

By the end of 1966, the Papatsis government was under pressure from several directions. Inflation was rising, strikes were spreading through industrial districts, and the army had become increasingly hostile to the left coalition. Right Cause accused the government of allowing communist influence to enter the state. Left-wing newspapers accused Kostas Vakardis and his allies of using employers, port companies and sympathetic officers to make the country ungovernable.

In November 1966, a freighter from an AFMC member state arrived at the port of Agia Triada. The cargo was officially listed as equipment connected to existing army supply contracts. This was unusual. Military cargoes normally entered Altis through facilities in Molos Bay or the Pyrgos Gulf, where the army maintained established channels for storage and onward transport. Agia Triada was a commercial port closely connected to Vakardis's business network.

The shipment passed without attracting the attention of the central government. Port officials treated it as a mixed commercial and military consignment, and the papers were in order. Several containers were moved from the docks to warehouses controlled by companies linked to Vakardis. From there, part of the cargo was transferred to private storage sites in the Athira area and to smaller facilities near Paros and Kalochori.

The material was intended for FIA. Although the organisation had been dissolved as an armed movement after the Gravia Agreement, its local networks had never disappeared. Former members remained active inside Right Cause, veterans' associations, port security groups and factory guard units. By late 1966, selected FIA cells were being quietly rearmed. The purpose was not to create a large militia, but to prepare small armed groups that could operate alongside the army if the political crisis became an open confrontation.

Papageorgiou and the Conspiracy

The central military figure in the conspiracy was General Dimitrias Papageorgiou. By November 1966, he had become one of the key officers arguing that the army should prepare for direct intervention. Papageorgiou and the officers around him believed that the Papatsis government had weakened the state, endangered Western military links and allowed the left to use social unrest as a political weapon.

Kostas Vakardis did not command the conspiracy, but he provided it with a civilian base. Since his time as prime minister he had maintained close relations with senior officers, foreign suppliers and business groups. His role was to give the army political cover among the right-wing parties, employers and conservative local elites. If the army moved, Vakardis and Right Cause could present the intervention as a necessary act of national rescue rather than a simple seizure of power.

The plan that developed during the winter of 1966–67 depended on radicalising the situation without making the army appear responsible for the crisis. FIA cells would be prepared for local action. Right Cause newspapers would describe every strike and demonstration as evidence of communist disorder. Sympathetic officers would press the government to use the army in support of the police. If emergency patrols were authorised, army units would already be positioned inside the main towns when the time came to move.

General Dimitrias Papageorgiou during an army inspection in central Altis, 1966.

This approach suited the conspirators because the state was already unstable. The government needed order, but it did not fully trust the police or the army. The left-wing parties demanded protection for workers and refugee districts, but they also feared that uncontrolled unrest would give the right an excuse for repression. Papatsis tried to hold the coalition together while avoiding an open break with the armed forces. This gave his opponents time.

The Paros Disturbances

A burned police car after the February disturbances in Paros, 1967.

The first major test came in February 1967. Paros had become one of the contested industrial towns between the left and the Vakardis economic network. Workers' meetings and wage demonstrations had been taking place for several weeks. The Communist Party and the Social Democratic Movement had influence among labour organisers, while Right Cause retained links to factory management and local security groups.

During one of the demonstrations, shots were fired from the edge of the crowd. A police vehicle was later burned near a side street, and a small police post was attacked by unidentified armed men. Several policemen were wounded in separate incidents over the following days. The attacks were limited in scale, but they were sufficient to change the political atmosphere. Right Cause immediately blamed radical leftists and accused the government of protecting the men responsible.

The Papatsis government denied that the left-wing parties had organised the violence, but it could not ignore the incidents. The opposition press described Paros as proof that the state was losing control of the factories and ports. Army officers warned that similar disturbances could spread to other towns. Local police commanders requested support, claiming that they could no longer guarantee order without military assistance.

Later accounts linked the February incidents to FIA cells operating in the Paros and Kalochori area. Their purpose had been to create the appearance of a left-wing escalation. The operation did not need to produce many casualties. It only needed to force the government into emergency measures and to justify the deployment of army units in areas where the conspirators expected resistance.

Emergency Measures

Papatsis responded by imposing curfews and authorising joint police and army patrols in Rodopoli, Charkia, Paros and Kalochori. These towns were selected because of their industrial importance, labour organisation and recent unrest. The government presented the measures as temporary. In practice, they changed the balance of power. Army units gained legal access to streets, road junctions, transport facilities and public buildings in several politically sensitive areas.

An Altis Army soldier on patrol during the emergency measures, spring 1967.

The emergency measures also produced a political backlash. Police and army patrols raided local trade-union civic centres and left-wing offices, searching for weapons and documents. Some raids found nothing. Others produced small quantities of arms, often impossible to connect to any central party structure. The left accused the police of acting on information supplied by Right Cause. Trade unions called new demonstrations, and several towns saw larger protests than before the curfews had been imposed.

The government was now trapped. If it withdrew the patrols, the opposition would accuse it of surrendering to radicals. If it continued the patrols, it alienated its own supporters and allowed the army to prepare the ground for intervention. Papatsis's ministers disagreed over the response. The Communists demanded investigations into Right Cause and FIA networks. The Social Democrats wanted to restore order without provoking the officer corps. The Movement of Democratic Socialists tried to prevent the coalition from breaking apart.

Papatsis himself became more cautious after the Greek coup of 21 April 1967. His security service understood that the events in Athens could encourage similar action on Altis. From 21 April onward, it prepared evacuation routes for the prime minister, increased security around his residence and attempted to check the loyalty of police and army units in Kavala. These preparations would later save Papatsis, but they could not prevent the collapse of the government.

24 April 1967

The Greek military coup created the opening that Papageorgiou and his allies had been waiting for. The new regime in Athens provided a precedent and reduced the risk that an Altian military intervention would be isolated diplomatically. The conspirators also feared that if they delayed, Papatsis might begin removing suspect officers from command. The decision to act was taken before the government could regain control of the security situation.

On 24 April 1967, army units moved into the streets of Altis's main towns. Because joint patrols had already been authorised, many units were already mobile and positioned near urban centres. The transition from patrol duty to seizure of power was therefore rapid. Transport junctions, radio facilities, telephone exchanges, police headquarters, port offices and government buildings were taken under military control.

In Kavala, army units detained members of parliament and left-wing officials near government buildings and party offices. Some were arrested under formal emergency orders. Others were held without clear charges. The operation in Kavala was intended to prevent the parliament from meeting and to break the civilian chain of command before the government could issue counter-orders. Similar actions took place in Athira, Pyrgos and several industrial towns.

At the same time, FIA cells emerged from hiding. Their role was different from that of the army. Soldiers controlled roads, communications and state buildings; FIA groups targeted party offices, trade-union centres, printing presses and local activists. Left-wing newspapers were closed or occupied. Documents, membership lists and printing equipment were seized. In several towns, FIA men acted as guides for military patrols, identifying houses, offices and meeting places associated with the left.

Papatsis was evacuated by his security service using a route prepared after 21 April. The details of his escape remained unclear in later accounts, but it was not accidental. His guards had expected an attempt to isolate or arrest him and moved before army units completed the cordon around the government district. Several ministers were not as fortunate and were detained before they could leave Kavala.

By the evening of 24 April, organised resistance by the government had ended. The army controlled the main communications network, the principal roads and the administrative centres. The parliament could no longer function. The left-wing coalition had lost its offices, its newspapers and much of its public leadership in a single day.

Army units detain members of parliament and left-wing officials outside a government building in Kavala, 24 April 1967.

The National Salvation Council

Late on 24 April, the officers announced the formation of the National Salvation Council. The council stated that the army had acted to prevent civil disorder, communist subversion and the collapse of the state. General Dimitrias Papageorgiou emerged as the leading figure of the new authority. The council suspended normal parliamentary activity, imposed censorship and confirmed the continuation of emergency measures across the island.

Right Cause and several conservative public figures welcomed the intervention. Vakardis did not appear as the formal leader of the new regime, but his support helped present the coup as a national correction rather than an army revolt. Altian Solution and parts of the Union of Centrists accepted the new order or called for calm. The Liberal Party divided between those who condemned the army and those who argued that the intervention had become unavoidable.

For the left, 24 April was a break in the political history of Altis. By the end of the day, at least eighty trade-union activists and members of left-wing parties had disappeared. Some were later confirmed to be in military custody. Others were never accounted for. The arrests and disappearances destroyed the legal position of the left-wing organisations and forced many surviving activists into exile, hiding or underground activity.

The April Coup ended the First Republic. The military had used a real political crisis, prepared militia support and the legal cover of emergency patrols to remove the elected government. The new regime presented itself as temporary and restorative. In practice, it created the conditions for a deeper conflict. The parties that had contained political violence since 1949 were no longer able to perform that role. After 24 April 1967, opposition to the state increasingly moved outside parliament and into clandestine organisation.

Armoured units of the Altis Army on the streets of Kavala after the April Coup, 24 April 1967.

The High Junta, 1967–1970

After the April Coup, the National Salvation Council presented itself as a temporary authority created to restore order. In practice, it became the centre of a new military regime. General Dimitrias Papageorgiou and the officers around him suspended normal parliamentary life, restricted the press and placed the main ministries under military supervision. The First Republic was not formally abolished at once, but its institutions no longer controlled the state.

The regime's first years were marked by a return of investment and by the recovery of projects interrupted during the political crisis of 1964–67. Strikes were suppressed, ports and roads were secured, and the government offered guarantees to foreign companies that had hesitated under the Papatsis administration. Western firms and investors from AFMC member states returned to construction, tourism, port development and light industry. Several large projects were restarted around Athira, Kalochori, Iraklia and the eastern coast.

This period strengthened the position of major industrialists. Kostas Vakardis, although not the formal head of the regime, became one of its most important civilian supporters. His companies benefited from port concessions, construction contracts, supply agreements and access to foreign capital. Other business families followed the same pattern. The junta encouraged private investment and treated the expansion of industrial and tourist infrastructure as proof that military rule had restored stability.

The economic growth of the late 1960s was real, but it was closely tied to corruption and political loyalty. Contracts were awarded through personal connections, military patronage and party networks linked to Right Cause and conservative circles. State resources were used to support companies considered loyal to the new order. Public criticism of these arrangements became increasingly difficult. Newspapers that investigated corruption were closed, censored or brought under new ownership.

Parliament continued to exist, but only as a decorative institution. Left-wing parties had been banned or forced underground, while the surviving legal parties operated within narrow limits. Altian Solution and parts of the Union of Centrists remained active because they accepted the new political framework. Deputies could debate local issues, budgets and development plans, but they could not challenge the authority of the National Salvation Council, the army or the security laws introduced after the coup.

For many citizens, especially in conservative towns and among the urban middle class, the first years of the junta appeared orderly. Inflation slowed for a time, foreign money returned, and public demonstrations almost disappeared. This stability was uneven. It depended on censorship, emergency powers and the exclusion of the political groups that had won the 1964 elections.

The unfinished hotel in Pefkos Bay. Once promoted as one of Vakardis's most ambitious tourism projects, it had become an abandoned shell by the time of the civil war.

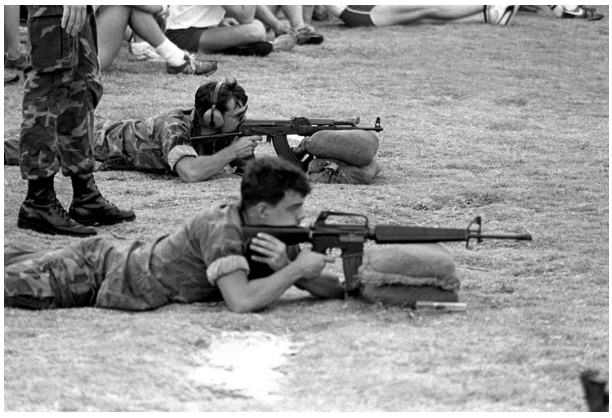
Security and Exclusion

The junta regarded the left not as an opposition, but as a security problem. The Communist Party of Altis was banned, its offices were closed, and its newspapers were confiscated. The Social Democratic Movement and the Movement of Democratic Socialists were also placed under severe restrictions. Some of their leaders were arrested. Others fled abroad, entered hiding or attempted to continue their work through legal civic organisations.

Trade unions were brought under state supervision. Independent labour committees were dissolved, and workplace representatives had to be approved by the authorities. In industrial districts, security officers monitored factories, ports and workers' housing. Former activists were dismissed from public employment or prevented from working in education, transport and administration. The government described these measures as necessary to prevent communist subversion.

The refugee question was reopened. Communities that had gained political recognition during the 1950s were again treated as suspect. The regime revised the legal status of many refugees and their descendants, especially in districts associated with the former DAG networks. Some retained residence and limited civil rights, but voting rights were withdrawn from large numbers of them. Access to public service, police employment, military careers and certain educational institutions became subject to loyalty checks.

This policy had a clear political purpose. Katalaki, Poliakko, Alikampos and several smaller refugee settlements had voted heavily for the left. By removing refugees from the electorate and placing their organisations under surveillance, the junta narrowed the political nation to groups considered loyal or manageable. Officially, these measures were presented as a review of citizenship records and wartime documentation. In practice, they excluded many of the communities that had been central to the left-wing victory of 1964.



Men of the 5th Brigade, National Guard, during weapons training near Athira, early 1970s.

Repression was not limited to laws and arrests. From 1971 onward, reports of disappearances increased in refugee districts and left-wing towns. Many cases were attributed locally to men connected with the 5th Brigade of the National Guard, based in Athira. The government denied any involvement, and no official investigation confirmed a pattern. In practice, the meaning of the disappearances was widely understood. Between 1971 and 1974, several hundred people disappeared. Speaking openly about these cases became dangerous.

The effect was cumulative. Refugee communities lost electoral influence, labour organisations lost legal protection, and left-wing politics was pushed out of public life. The regime restored order on the surface, but it also destroyed the channels through which social conflict had been contained since 1949.

The National Guard

One of the most important institutions created by the junta was the National Guard. It was presented as a force for internal security, border control and public order. In practice, it combined elements of the former police, customs structures, port security and loyalist militia networks. Its creation gave the regime a force that was more political than the regular army and more militarised than the police.

The National Guard was organised around six nominal brigades. The term "brigade" was political rather than organisational. Most of these units numbered only 250 to 400 men, depending on local manpower and available equipment. They were closer to reinforced territorial battalions or security groups than to regular army brigades. Their purpose was not to fight conventional battles, but to control roads, ports, factories, refugee districts and areas of known political opposition.

Recruitment reflected local politics. Former policemen, customs officers, port guards, veterans' groups and loyalist volunteers provided much of the manpower. In several districts, especially around Athira, men linked to the old FIA networks entered the new force. This gave the National Guard a strongly anti-communist character from the beginning. It also meant that local rivalries and political grudges were carried into an official security institution.

The 5th Brigade became the most notorious example of this process. Based in Athira, it drew heavily from FIA circles and from communities dependent on the Vakardis economic network. Its members knew the industrial districts, the refugee settlements and the roads around Paros, Kalochori, Charkia and Agia Triada. Officially, the brigade was responsible for public security and protection of strategic sites. Unofficially, it became one of the regime's instruments for intimidation in areas associated with the left.

Vakardis played an important role in the development of the National Guard. Through his commercial contacts and AFMC supply channels, equipment could be acquired outside the normal army procurement system. Vehicles, communications equipment, uniforms, small arms, spare parts and transport support moved through networks already linked to his businesses. This strengthened his position inside the regime. He did not command the National Guard, but parts of it depended on systems he helped to finance or supply.

The army tolerated this arrangement because the National Guard reduced the burden on regular units. The AAF could concentrate on barracks, strategic roads, airfields and external defence, while the National Guard handled internal security. The result was a divided security system: the army remained the core of the state, but the National Guard became the regime's local hand.

National Guard patrol on the streets of Paros, early 1970s.

Papageorgiou and Vakardis

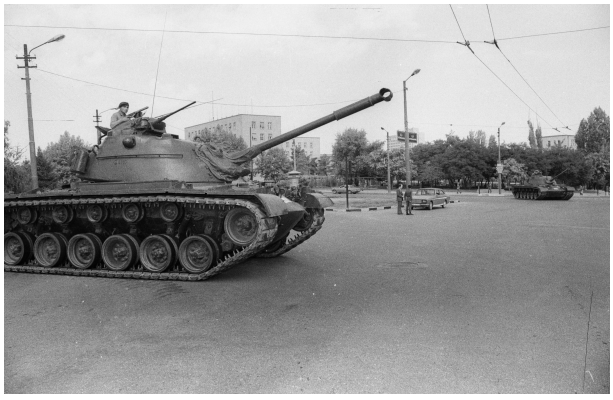
The alliance between Papageorgiou and Vakardis was essential to the survival of the junta, but it did not rest on identical political ideas. Papageorgiou and a number of officers in the AAF retained sympathy for enosis. For them, Altis was culturally and strategically tied to Greece, and the military regime in Athens provided both an example and a source of political confidence. Some conservative groups and a small part of the population shared this view.

Vakardis was different. He was a convinced Altian nationalist. His nationalism was anti-communist and conservative, but it was based on the independence of Altis rather than union with Greece. For Vakardis, an independent Altian state gave local industrialists, port owners and political patrons the ability to control contracts, land, labour and foreign investment. Enosis would have placed these interests inside a larger Greek political and economic system, reducing the autonomy of the island's elite.

This disagreement did not produce an open conflict. Papageorgiou understood that enosis had little popular support. The referendum of 1950, the growth of a separate Altian identity and the continuing presence of refugee communities had made union with Greece politically dangerous. Without Vakardis, Right Cause networks and the business elite, the army could not impose such a policy without risking a new crisis. For this reason, enosis remained an ideological preference among some officers rather than a practical programme of the regime.

The working compromise was simple. Papageorgiou controlled the state, the army and the National Salvation Council. Vakardis and the civilian right provided economic capacity, local legitimacy and access to foreign capital. The regime spoke of national unity, anti-communism and order, but avoided any immediate attempt to redefine the constitutional position of Altis. Independence remained the official framework because it was the only framework that could hold the ruling coalition together.

This compromise also shaped foreign relations. The junta maintained links with Greece and the West, while AFMC contacts continued to support investment and security procurement. At the same time, the regime tried to present itself as a stable anti-communist government rather than a dependent extension of Athens. This position allowed it to attract investment while suppressing domestic opposition under the language of national security.



An AAF tank outside the General Staff building in Pyrgos, 1973.

Stagnation and Collapse

By 1970, the economic momentum of the early junta years had begun to slow. Many of the easiest projects had already been restarted or allocated. New investment became harder to attract without larger subsidies, tax advantages or political guarantees. Corruption increased the cost of public works, while companies close to the regime received preferential access to contracts and credit.

Inflation rose sharply between 1970 and 1972. Imported goods became more expensive, wages lagged behind prices, and the government used controls and subsidies to avoid open unrest. These measures reduced pressure in the short term, but they also strained the budget. The regime could suppress strikes more easily than the Papatsis government, but it could not remove the underlying problems of fuel dependence, limited industrial capacity and unequal development.

The refugee districts and poorer towns were hit hardest. Their residents had fewer legal protections, less access to state employment and little ability to organise openly. Prices rose while political channels remained closed. In these conditions, underground networks began to recover. Former left-wing activists, refugee committees and labour organisers rebuilt contacts quietly. The state had destroyed their legal organisations, but it had not removed the social base that had supported them.

The fuel crisis of 1973 turned stagnation into a deeper crisis. Transport costs increased, construction slowed, and imported machinery and fuel became harder to obtain. Tourism projects lost momentum. Factories dependent on imported supplies reduced output or demanded state support. The army and National Guard also became more expensive to operate, as vehicles, generators and communications systems all depended on fuel and spare parts.

The regime responded with controls, rationing measures and more repression. It blamed foreign conditions, communist agitation and corruption among lower officials, but it did not challenge the patronage networks at the centre of the economy. Public confidence declined. Businessmen complained privately that the state had become unpredictable. Workers and refugees had no legal means to protest. Officers worried that social unrest would return, but now under more clandestine and violent forms.

By 1974, the junta still controlled the state, but it no longer controlled the direction of the crisis. The parliament had become a formal shell. Refugee communities had been excluded again from political life. The National Guard had grown into a local security instrument tied to loyalist networks and private patrons. Several hundred people had disappeared in circumstances the regime refused to investigate. The economy, once used to justify military rule, was now one of the main sources of instability.

The National Salvation Council had promised order after the crisis of the First Republic. It had delivered order by removing much of society from politics. When the economy began to fail, those excluded groups had little reason to defend the system. The conditions for a new phase of opposition were already present before the first open shots of the civil war.

Fuel queues during the 1973 crisis. Rising prices and shortages helped turn economic stagnation into a political crisis for the junta.

THE SURGE OF VIOLENCE, 1974–1975

The Fall of the Greek Junta

By the summer of 1974, the National Salvation Council faced a crisis it could no longer contain through censorship and police control alone. The economic problems that had developed after 1970 had not been solved. Inflation remained high, fuel shortages had weakened transport and industry, and many construction and tourism projects had slowed or stopped. The regime still controlled the army, the National Guard and the state administration, but its claim to have restored stability was increasingly difficult to sustain.

An AAF tank deployed on the streets of Kavala during the unrest of August 1974.

The fall of the military junta in Greece after the Cyprus fiasco had a major effect on Altis. Since 1967, General Dimitrias Papageorgiou and many officers in the AAF had looked to Athens as a political example and a source of confidence. When the Greek junta collapsed, that example disappeared. For opponents of the Altian regime, the lesson was clear. A military government could fall. What had happened in Greece could also happen on Altis.

The regime tried to prevent this comparison from spreading. Newspapers were ordered to limit coverage of events in Greece, and public meetings about Cyprus or the fall of the Greek junta were restricted. These measures had little effect. News passed through ports, foreign radio broadcasts, sailors, students and families with relatives abroad. In refugee districts, workers' quarters and opposition circles, the fall of the Greek junta was understood as proof that military rule was not permanent.

The social conditions on Altis made the situation worse. Refugee communities remained excluded from the electorate. Labour rights were limited, independent unions were suppressed, and many workers had no legal way to press demands. The National Guard continued to operate in districts associated with the left. Reports of disappearances and beatings had become common by 1974, even if the authorities denied any organised campaign. In many towns, the fear that had kept opposition quiet since 1967 began to weaken.

The Syrta Shootings

The first major demonstrations took place in late July and early August 1974. They were not organised by a single party or underground movement. Some were led by students, former trade-union activists and relatives of political prisoners. Others began as local protests over prices, fuel shortages and National Guard abuses. Demonstrators called for the restoration of political rights, the release of detainees and an end to emergency rule.

Syrta became the site of the most important incident. On 8 August 1974, a peaceful demonstration gathered in the town centre after several days of tension. The crowd included workers, students, former municipal activists and families from nearby settlements. Local police units, already nervous after earlier protests, attempted to block the demonstrators from moving towards government buildings. The situation deteriorated when the crowd refused to disperse.

National Guard troops face demonstrators in Rodopoli, August 1974.

The police opened disorganised fire. There was no clear evidence of an order to massacre the demonstrators. The shooting appears to have resulted from panic, poor command and fear of the crowd. Four demonstrators were killed and eleven were wounded. The authorities claimed that the police had been attacked by agitators, but witnesses rejected this version. The deaths in Syrta became the first major political shock of the post-Cyprus period on Altis.

The regime treated the shootings as a security incident. The opposition treated them as proof that peaceful protest could be met with live fire. Funerals for the dead were monitored by police and National Guard units. Several people who tried to distribute leaflets about the shootings were arrested. In the weeks that followed, anti-government slogans appeared in refugee districts, on factory walls and along roads near Syrta, Katalaki and Charkia.

The Syrta shootings did not immediately produce an organised uprising. They did, however, change the political mood. Moderates who had hoped for gradual reform lost influence. Younger activists and former members of banned organisations began to argue that demonstrations alone would not bring down the regime. The state had shown that it would defend itself with force, even when confronted by unarmed crowds.

Raids and Retaliation

From September 1974 onward, Altis entered a period that later accounts described as the surge of violence. The first attacks were small and scattered. Isolated police vehicles were fired on or burned. Informants were threatened. National Guard patrols were ambushed with stones, petrol bombs and occasional gunfire. In several towns, unknown men attacked police posts or stole weapons from local storage rooms.

AAF armoured personnel carriers move out during a security operation between Dorida and Kalochori, November 1974.

Most of these actions were not yet directed by a central command. They were carried out by small groups, former activists, local radicals or individuals seeking revenge. The government described all of them as communist terrorism. In reality, the violence was still fragmented. There were no large guerrilla camps, no unified insurgent command and no continuous front. The regime was facing the early signs of armed resistance, not yet an organised war.

The most serious incident of the autumn occurred in November 1974, when a small armed group seized an army truck carrying ammunition. The details were never fully established. The truck was taken on a secondary road during a movement between storage sites, and several crates of small-arms ammunition disappeared. The attack caused alarm inside the AAF because it showed that weapons and ammunition could be captured from the state without a direct assault on a barracks.

An AAF armoured personnel carrier in Neochori during security operations, November 1974.

The response was severe. The army and National Guard conducted raids in slums, refugee districts and workers' quarters. Searches were carried out in Katalaki, Poliakko, Alikampos, Charkia, Paros and several smaller settlements. Men with old political records were detained for questioning. Trade-union contacts, former members of left-wing parties and families associated with disappeared activists were placed under renewed pressure. Some raids found weapons. Many found nothing.

Security forces also began searching for guerrilla camps in the hills and rural districts. These searches were often based on rumours, informant reports or assumptions about where future insurgents might hide. Patrols moved through the western highlands, around Oreokastro, and along roads leading towards isolated villages. The irony was that the regime was often looking for a developed guerrilla movement before such a movement existed. Its own operations helped convince the opposition that scattered resistance had to be organised.

Two Underground Armies

The climate of late 1974 forced underground opposition leaders to make a decision. Uncoordinated violence could provoke repression, but it could not defeat the regime. If resistance continued in this form, the army and National Guard would destroy small groups one by one. During the final months of 1974 and the first months of 1975, two armed organisations began to take shape: the Altis Republican Forces and the Altis People's Liberation Army.

The Altis Republican Forces, or ARF, emerged from republican and anti-junta circles that wanted the restoration of the First Republic. Its supporters came from different political backgrounds. Former social democrats, liberals, municipal activists, some centrists and a number of clerical opponents of the junta entered its networks. ARF did not seek a communist revolution. Its declared aim was the removal of the National Salvation Council and the return of constitutional government.

The leader of ARF was Elias Totides, a former policeman from Syrta. Totides had left the service after the police were absorbed into the National Guard. This gave him credibility among those who opposed the militarisation of internal security. It also gave him practical knowledge of police procedures, road controls and local command structures. Syrta provided part of his political legitimacy, while Oreokastro and the surrounding highlands gave ARF a territorial base.

Oreokastro was especially important. The area had a tradition of local resistance and suspicion of central authority. Its geography offered routes, hiding places and access to smaller settlements beyond easy state control. By early 1975, ARF networks were active among local autonomists, former municipal figures and men familiar with the mountain roads. The organisation remained small, but it had a clear political identity and a defensible environment.

APLA had a different origin and a different goal. The Altis People's Liberation Army was the direct successor to the old DAG tradition on Altis. It drew support from Marxists, Maoists, radical left activists, refugee communities, workers and far-left intellectuals. APLA did not aim to restore the First Republic. Its leaders argued that the First Republic had failed because it preserved the same class structures, private patronage and weak institutions that allowed the army to seize power in 1967. Their objective was a communist state.

Dimitrios Papatsis secretly returned to Altis to take control of the emerging APLA structure. His return connected the armed underground with the former legal left. To supporters, he was the prime minister overthrown by the army. To the regime, he was proof that the banned left had chosen armed subversion. Under Papatsis, APLA began to connect refugee districts, worker cells and rural sympathisers into a more disciplined organisation.

At this stage, ARF and APLA were still friendly to one another. Their political objectives were different, but both recognised the National Salvation Council as the immediate enemy. ARF needed workers and refugee contacts in the towns. APLA needed access to rural routes, safe houses and non-communist opposition circles. Cooperation was practical before it became ideological. Both movements understood that acting separately would give the regime time to isolate them.

Field commanders of ARF and APLA during a coordination meeting, early April 1975.

The Anniversary Plan

The regime responded to the growth of unrest by increasing control over communications and movement. Radio stations, telephone exchanges, road junctions, bridges, ports and fuel storage sites received additional guards. National Guard patrols were increased in industrial districts and around refugee settlements. Intelligence foot patrols searched rural areas for camps, supply caches and courier routes. The authorities expected a gradual increase in small attacks, not a coordinated island-wide operation.

This assumption helped the opposition. Preparations for a larger action were kept compartmentalised. Local sympathisers stored food, clothing, medical supplies and ammunition in small quantities. Workers passed information about shift patterns, police movements and guarded facilities. In refugee districts, old family and political networks helped hide men moving between towns. In the west, Oreokastro and its surrounding villages provided ARF with routes and shelter. APLA relied on Katalaki, Poliakko, Alikampos, Charkia and left-wing contacts in the industrial towns.

The date selected for the first coordinated action was 24 April 1975, the anniversary of the junta's seizure of power. The choice was political as well as operational. By striking on the same date, ARF and APLA intended to show that the regime no longer controlled the meaning of its own anniversary. The operation would not be a general uprising, but it would announce that organised armed opposition had begun.

The plan called for attacks on army and National Guard facilities, convoy ambushes, vehicle-borne explosive attacks and local actions designed to confuse the security forces. APLA prepared operations in areas where it had strong worker and refugee support. ARF focused on routes, patrols and targets connected to the western and interior districts. The two organisations did not yet have the strength to hold major towns, but they could strike in several places at once.

Infestiona became one of the planned APLA actions. During the days before 24 April, armed men were seen unloading trucks near the village. Local inhabitants reported the activity, but the 5th Brigade of the National Guard had received many similar reports during the previous month. Most had led to nothing. This helped APLA conceal the preparation of a real ambush behind the pattern of false alarms, rumours and small weapons caches that had already exhausted the attention of local security units.

By the morning of 24 April 1975, the regime believed it was dealing with scattered radicals, hidden weapons and possible small guerrilla groups. It had not understood that two organised armed movements were ready to act on the same day. The surge of violence that began in 1974 had not burned out. It had been organised, armed and given a date.

An ARF armed pick-up during the raid on Aggelochori, 24 April 1975.

THE APRIL RAIDS, 1975

The Agreement

By April 1975, the armed opposition on Altis had already moved beyond scattered violence. The arrests, reprisals and clandestine attacks of the previous months had created the conditions for war, but the events of 24 April gave that war its first organised form. The attacks carried out that day were not a spontaneous uprising. They were the result of a practical agreement between the Altian Republican Front and the Altian People's Liberation Army.

The agreement did not create a unified command. ARF and APLA remained separate organisations, with different political aims, different methods and different social bases. Their cooperation was based on geography rather than ideology. The two groups divided their areas of operation along the island's main highway. Territory north of the road was treated as the ARF's sphere, while the south became the area of APLA activity. This arrangement prevented competition during the first phase of the uprising and allowed both organisations to strike the AAF at the same time.

The division also revealed the future weakness of the anti-junta front. ARF and APLA could coordinate attacks, but they did not share a political project. The ARF represented a broad non-communist opposition to the junta: republicans, nationalists, clericals, deserters and members of the apolitical underground. APLA was a Marxist revolutionary organisation, tied to external support from MEC and the Eastern Bloc. In April 1975 these differences were not yet enough to break the alliance, but they shaped the way each movement fought from the beginning.

ARF in the North

The ARF's main objective was Oreokastro and the surrounding high ground. The choice was military as much as political. The district was difficult for heavy forces to enter, with forests, hills, mountains and poor dirt roads limiting the movement of armoured vehicles. Only one asphalt road, running from the direction of Syrta and Kore, provided a reliable approach to the town. For a lightly armed insurgent force, this geography offered protection that weapons alone could not provide.

ARF fighters attacked the AAF garrison in Syrta on 24 April. The action was brief but costly for the regime. Eight members of the garrison were killed and twelve wounded. Seven soldiers defected to the ARF, while others escaped the town or hid in civilian homes until the insurgents withdrew. The ARF did not attempt to hold Syrta. The town was too exposed, and its retention would have invited an immediate government response. Instead, the raid provided weapons, disrupted local command and helped conceal the real focus of the northern operation.

The police station in Oreokastro fell with little resistance. The local police changed sides, giving the ARF both manpower and legitimacy. Under the leadership of Elias Totides, the movement accepted defectors from the security services if they had not been directly implicated in repression or disappearances. This policy caused suspicion among some fighters, but it reflected the ARF's wider political character. The organisation wanted to present itself as a national opposition front rather than a revolutionary purge movement.

By the end of 24 April, the ARF had cleared the limited AAF presence from a radius of roughly three and a half to four and a half kilometres around Oreokastro. It occupied Faros and Aristi, moved close to Fothia and established positions in the mountains above the settlement. Roads were mined, patrols were organised and the only asphalt approach to Oreokastro was brought under fire control. A separate raid on Aggelochori, a suburb of Kavala, had a more psychological purpose. It wounded two civilians and did not create a permanent ARF presence, but it forced the regime to consider the possibility of attacks near one of its major urban centres.

AAF garrison forces in Syrta, 24 April 1975.

The Oreokastro Counterattacks

The AAF responded quickly. On 25 April, a mechanised column was sent toward Oreokastro to restore control before the ARF could consolidate. The decision was reasonable from the perspective of the General Staff. The ARF was believed to be small, lightly armed and vulnerable to a rapid armoured response. A swift counterattack could have destroyed the enclave before it became a symbol.

Instead, the column moved into terrain prepared by the insurgents. Restricted to the main road, it entered a kill zone covered from the surrounding heights. Mines, heavy machine guns and recoilless rifles halted the advance. Several tanks and armoured personnel carriers were lost before the column withdrew. The defeat did not destroy the AAF's local strength, but it proved that the Oreokastro district could not be retaken by a single road-bound thrust.

A tank destroyed during the first raid on Oreokastro.

A second attempt followed on 2 May. It also failed. By then the AAF had more information about ARF positions, but the basic problem had not changed. Blocking forces on the roads near Fothia and Aristi came under fire from dominant heights. The use of aircraft did not produce the desired result. ARF fighters dispersed through wooded and broken ground, where targets were difficult to identify and fire could not be reliably corrected. Air attacks could damage suspected positions, but they could not restore permanent control over the mountains.

These failures gave Oreokastro its first wartime importance. The ARF had not defeated the AAF in open battle, but it had survived the regime's immediate response. Several cases of desertion from AAF blocking positions to the ARF were recorded in the following days. They were limited in number, but politically significant. For many soldiers who opposed the junta, the ARF was a more acceptable destination than APLA. The northern enclave therefore became not only a defensive position, but also a point of attraction for non-communist opposition inside the security forces.

APLA in the South

South of the main highway, APLA carried out a different kind of operation. Its actions on 24 April included the ambush at Infestion, the raid on the Altis Aeroclub airfield south of Katalaki and the temporary blocking of the main highway near Paros. The Infestion ambush had already shown the movement's ability to plan and execute a lethal attack. The wider April operation showed that APLA was not acting as a local cell, but as an organisation preparing for a sustained revolutionary war.

The highway action near Paros was conducted by three small foot detachments, each numbering roughly twelve to eighteen fighters and armed with grenade launchers. The road had been mined in advance. APLA held up movement for more than a day, disrupting the island's most important communications and complicating the AAF's ability to move forces between threatened areas. The purpose was not to hold the road permanently. It was to show that small, mobile groups could interrupt the state's main artery whenever the regime concentrated elsewhere.

The airfield south of Katalaki had a different role. It was not intended as a major cargo-receiving point. APLA could not use it to bring in heavy shipments. Its value lay in the light civilian aircraft captured there, which could be used for smuggling personnel, documents, money, radio equipment and compact military cargo. The AAF recognised this danger quickly. On 26 April, government aircraft struck the airfield and destroyed all four light aircraft present there.

The airstrike was one of the regime's first tactical successes, but it did not restore control of the site. The airfield remained in APLA hands after the aircraft were destroyed. Its value as an aviation asset was lost, but it became part of the southern rebel position. This distinction was important in the first phase of the war. The AAF could still strike from the air, but air power alone could not re-establish state authority on the ground.

The Southern Base

APLA's most important success was the creation of a southern base around Therisa, Katalaki, Poliakko and the bays of Naftia and Melanera. The movement had expected clandestine deliveries from MEC-linked channels, and the April operations were designed in part to secure the coastal points needed to receive them. Heavy machine guns, mortars, small arms, mines, ammunition and two PT-76 amphibious light tanks were brought into the area.

The arrival of the PT-76s had great propaganda value. It demonstrated that APLA had external support, trained personnel and access to weapons beyond the normal reach of an underground movement. The tanks were operated by pre-trained APLA crews, while one MEC instructor present with the movement took command of one of the vehicles. For a short time their appearance gave APLA a psychological advantage and allowed it to threaten isolated positions more directly than before.

Their effect was brief. Both tanks were lost within the first weeks to AAF recoilless rifle fire. One was destroyed during an APLA attack on Poliakko, the other in a local battle near Katalaki Bay, close to the town of the same name. Their loss showed the limits of heavy equipment in the hands of a young insurgent force. APLA lacked the maintenance structure, protection and combined-arms support needed to keep armour in action for long. The tanks had proved the seriousness of MEC support, but they did not transform APLA into a regular army.

The southern position survived without them. APLA relied instead on militia manpower, mines, recoilless rifle points, mobile mortar teams and observation from high ground. Mount Riga became especially important. Zaros remained under AAF control, but APLA held the height above it. From Riga, observers could watch movement in the surrounding area and help correct mortar fire. The result was an unstable military geography: the regime held the town below, while the insurgents held the ground from which the town and its approaches could be threatened.

A National Guard soldier inspects a destroyed APLA tank near Poliakko, May 1975.

Urban Guerrilla

While the southern base was being consolidated, APLA also opened a wider campaign of urban guerrilla attacks. These actions were scattered across the island and varied in scale. Police stations, military units, patrols and posts were attacked in Paros, Rodopoli, Kalohori, Charkia, Dorida and Panochori. Most of these operations did not change territorial control, but they forced the AAF to defend far more places than it could easily secure.

The urban campaign gave APLA a different presence from the ARF. The ARF's strength lay in its control of a defensible northern enclave and in its appeal to non-communist opposition. APLA combined a southern base with mobile cells, coastal supply routes and attacks across the island. It did not need to hold every town in which it operated. Its purpose was to make the regime uncertain, stretch its forces and show that the war was not confined to one front.

This method also carried political risks. In 1975, APLA's urban actions were still presented as attacks on the security apparatus and military infrastructure. Over time, however, the same logic would push the organisation toward more indiscriminate methods. The first months of the war already showed the difference between a broad opposition front and a revolutionary movement prepared to treat the entire state structure as a battlefield.

The Regime's Response

The AAF's early response was almost entirely military. Columns were sent toward Oreokastro, aircraft were used against suspected insurgent positions, garrisons were reinforced and arrests increased in districts associated with the opposition. The regime treated the April attacks as a security emergency that could be contained by force before it grew into a wider war.

Repression increased, but it did not produce the intended result. Searches, detentions and punitive measures drove more men into the insurgent organisations. The effect differed by region and politics. In some areas, anger at the regime strengthened APLA recruitment. In others, especially among soldiers, conservative opponents of the junta and non-communist underground networks, the ARF benefited more. The junta's pressure therefore enlarged both wings of the opposition, even as it tried to destroy them.

The regime also framed the crisis as a campaign against communist violence. This language had some force when applied to APLA, whose Marxist identity and foreign connections were real. It was less effective against the ARF, whose membership included republicans, nationalists, clericals, deserters and local anti-junta groups. By describing all armed opposition as a single communist threat, the regime simplified the conflict for domestic and foreign propaganda, but misunderstood the political structure of the insurgency.

The Shape of the War

By the first days of June 1975, the first shape of the civil war had emerged. The AAF still held the state. It controlled the main cities, the air force, most of the bureaucracy and the formal instruments of government. It could move mechanised units along the main roads and strike from the air. It had destroyed the light aircraft captured by APLA and had inflicted losses on the movement's newly arrived armour.

Yet the regime had failed to crush the uprising in its first weeks. Around Oreokastro, the ARF held a mountain enclave that could not be easily entered by road-bound forces. In the south, APLA held the damaged airfield, Mount Riga and coastal access to the bays of Naftia and Melanera. The loss of the PT-76s reduced APLA's conventional strength, but did not destroy its ability to fight as a dispersed insurgent force. Its mobile mortars, militia groups and urban cells continued to complicate AAF operations.

Soldiers of the 3rd Brigade of the Altis National Guard in Zaros, June 1975.

The April raids therefore did not overthrow the junta, nor did they give the insurgents control of the island. Their significance was more lasting. They created the first durable geography of the war. The ARF established a non-communist rebel zone in the north. APLA established a revolutionary base and island-wide guerrilla network in the south. The AAF retained the state, but no longer possessed uncontested control of the territory.

The war that followed would not be a single front moving across a map. It would be a war of roads, hills, ports, airstrips, villages and loyalties. Its first weeks showed why it could not be decided quickly. The regime was too strong to collapse, but the insurgency was already too rooted to be suppressed by one campaign.

THE FIRST CAMPAIGNS, 1975–1976

The Northern Consolidation, 1975

After the April raids, the ARF did not attempt to transform its first successes into an immediate general offensive. The movement's leadership understood the limits of its position. It held Oreokastro and the surrounding high ground, but it lacked the manpower, heavy weapons and logistical depth required to challenge the AAF in the open. Its first priority was therefore consolidation rather than expansion.

Throughout the rest of 1975, ARF activity spread across the north-western part of Altis, from Oreokastro toward Frini. The movement avoided entering major towns for any length of time. Instead, it attacked patrols, isolated checkpoints and small detachments moving through the hills and rural roads. Its fighters used the terrain to deny the AAF secure movement without forcing themselves into battles they could not sustain. This gave the northern war a different character from the fighting in the south. It was slower, less visible and less costly, but it steadily widened the area where state authority could no longer operate without armed protection.

The ARF also began developing clandestine coastal points for foreign deliveries and smuggling. These sites had limited capacity and could not support large conventional operations, but their number made them difficult to suppress. Small quantities of weapons, radios, medical supplies and money could enter through fishing routes and isolated coves. The details of these supply networks would become more important later, but by late 1975 they already allowed the ARF to prepare for a larger campaign without exposing its main bases.

The AAF was forced into counter-guerrilla warfare for which it had little experience. Regular army units could hold roads, barracks and towns, but they were less effective in the forests, hills and sparsely populated areas where ARF fighters operated. The more immediate threat to the ARF came from the National Guard. Its brigades were smaller and less formal than regular army units, but they were better suited to raids, searches and local intimidation. In October 1975, the National Guard carried out a successful raid against an ARF base at Tonos Bay. The operation did not break the northern insurgency, but it showed that the regime still possessed forces capable of striking into areas the army could not permanently occupy.

For much of 1975, ARF activity appeared limited. This appearance was misleading. The movement was recruiting, building contacts inside the security forces and accumulating weapons. In November, the army garrison at Frini defected almost in full strength, bringing its weapons with it. The defection was one of the most important northern developments of the year. It demonstrated that the ARF's policy toward defectors had produced results, and it confirmed that parts of the AAF regarded the non-communist resistance as a possible political future rather than simply an enemy.

ARF militiamen pose next to an armed jeep, northern Altis, 1975.

The Battle for Zaros

The southern war developed more rapidly. APLA had entered the conflict with a different political aim and a different military method. It sought not only to harass the regime, but to create a revolutionary base from which the war could be expanded. The positions taken around Therisa, Katalaki, Poliakko and Melanera in the spring of 1975 gave the movement a foundation for this effort.

In late June, APLA began the battle for Zaros. The town remained under AAF control, but its position had become increasingly vulnerable. APLA fighters infiltrated the town in small groups, while militia forces concentrated around Mount Riga. The height gave APLA observation over the area, but it also drew constant artillery fire and air attacks. The struggle for Riga and Zaros therefore became one of the first sustained tests of APLA's ability to absorb losses while maintaining pressure.

The fighting continued through July. It was costly for APLA, but the movement gradually increased its presence inside and around the town. The AAF held Zaros for weeks, but its control became increasingly narrow. Supply, movement and communication were disrupted by mortar fire, ambushes and local infiltration. In August, Zaros fell to APLA. The capture of the town was the movement's most important success since the April raids. It provided a political victory, a logistical centre and a base from which APLA could push farther west and north.

The fall of Zaros produced a chain reaction. APLA took Edessa to the west, entrenched in the mountains north of the town and captured the important height of Agios Panagiotis. By the end of August, Poliakko was also in APLA hands. MEC-linked deliveries increased during this period. APLA received additional heavy crew-served weapons and, in small numbers, Strela-2 man-portable air-defence systems. After the rapid loss of the PT-76 tanks earlier in the year, MEC did not send further armoured vehicles. APLA did, however, capture two operational M48 tanks in Zaros. These vehicles had value, but like the earlier PT-76s, they were difficult for an insurgent army to maintain and employ for long periods.

The limits of APLA's offensive appeared quickly. In August, the movement attempted to advance toward the Xirolimni dam north of Zaros, but its forces were stopped in more open terrain. The same fighters who were dangerous in hills, woods and urban approaches were more exposed when forced to move against prepared positions across ground where AAF artillery, armour and aircraft could be used more effectively. By the end of the month, APLA's momentum had weakened. The movement shifted toward stabilising its gains and continuing guerrilla activity elsewhere on the island.

APLA fighters guard captured AAF troops following the capture of Zaros, 1975.

Frini and the Northern War, 1976

The defection of Frini changed the northern balance, but it did not immediately produce a major ARF offensive. In December 1975 and January 1976, the 5th Brigade of the National Guard attempted to retake the town. The effort failed to develop into a sustained operation. The brigade lacked the manpower and heavy weapons required to force the issue, and the army could not spare enough resources to support it. AAF commanders were dissatisfied, but the main weight of the war was still in the south, where APLA forced the regime to commit larger formations.

Frini therefore remained in ARF hands. Together with Oreokastro, it gave the movement a broader northern base. The large, sparsely populated areas under ARF influence became increasingly difficult for the state to understand or police. Army intelligence and the National Guard continued to send patrols and reconnaissance groups into these districts, but they did so cautiously. In March 1976, an army reconnaissance detachment sent toward Mount Synneforos disappeared in full strength. The incident became a symbol of the north-western interior: a region where the AAF could still enter, but no longer possessed routine control.

The ARF used this period to expand its infrastructure rather than seek decisive battle. The network of small coastal supply points grew in importance, allowing greater volumes of weapons to enter the north in small consignments. The movement also began probing the approaches to Syrta and Abdera. Covert parties reached Mount Agios Minas and left observers there, taking advantage of the mountain's view toward Syrta. These actions were not yet the beginning of a formal offensive. They were preparation for one.

The main ARF objective for 1976 was Galati, at the foot of Mount Pyrsos. The mountain dominated much of the surrounding district and stood near Abdera, Galati and, at a greater distance, Syrta. AAF positions on Pyrsos were heavily fortified and kept much of the area under fire control. Direct assault was not realistic. The only practical approach lay near Galati, and even there the ARF moved carefully. Several small raids were carried out into Abdera and Galati, but the movement avoided aggressive escalation. Its commanders did not want to draw enough attention to force the AAF to strengthen positions that would be needed for a later campaign.

The Western Coast

The ARF's caution did not mean complete inactivity. In the west, its fighters advanced toward the heights of Mount Kira and attempted to take Agios Konstantinos on the western coast. The town was important because it offered access to the coast and threatened to widen the northern insurgent zone beyond the Oreokastro-Frini axis. For a time in July 1976, the ARF controlled Agios Konstantinos.

The position could not be held indefinitely. Strong AAF forces remained in the valley between Kore and Aggelochori, and government reinforcements reached the area in strength. Once the AAF brought up heavier weapons, the ARF withdrew into the forests and mountains rather than accept a conventional battle. The withdrawal followed the pattern established earlier in the war. ARF units could seize exposed or poorly defended locations, but they would not sacrifice their limited forces for towns that the AAF could isolate and bombard.

This caution strengthened the ARF over time, but it also affected relations with APLA. In the south, APLA was fighting costly battles, holding exposed heights and attempting to take towns under artillery and air attack. To many APLA commanders, the ARF's methods looked like inaction. The ARF saw the matter differently. Its leaders believed that premature offensives would waste the manpower and weapons they needed for a larger campaign. By 1976, this difference in tempo had become a political problem inside the anti-junta camp.

ARF militiamen during street fighting in Agios Konstantinos, 1976.

The Pressure on Panochori

APLA machine-gun position on Mount Agios Panagiotis, 1976.

APLA entered 1976 in a stronger position than it had held at the beginning of the war, but its gains were not secure. During the winter of 1975–76, the movement fortified the territory taken the previous year and prepared for serious AAF attacks. It also shifted part of its effort westward. Control of Mount Agios Panagiotis allowed APLA to take the neighbouring Mount Tafos, which overlooked Panochori only a few kilometres south of Kavala.

Panochori became one of the most important contested points of 1976. The town was confined by mountains on three sides and connected to the outside world by two asphalt roads running through difficult serpentine routes. For APLA, its capture would bring the war close to Kavala and threaten the regime's sense of security in one of its major urban areas. For the AAF, its loss would be politically dangerous and militarily costly. The regime therefore held the town with determination, despite the difficulty of supplying its garrison.

APLA used artillery against Panochori, including Type 63 multiple rocket launchers and D-44 guns. These were among the first artillery systems employed by the movement and marked another stage in the militarisation of the southern front. The bombardments caused serious destruction in the town, but they did not produce its capture. The AAF managed to keep the garrison supplied at heavy cost, while APLA retained the heights and continued to threaten the approaches. Neither side could impose a decision. The result was a prolonged local struggle in which the town remained under government control while the surrounding high ground remained contested or in insurgent hands.

The fighting around Panochori also demonstrated the changing character of the war. APLA was no longer only a guerrilla movement using ambushes and mines. It was now capable of applying artillery to fixed targets. At the same time, its inability to take the town showed that firepower alone could not solve the problems of assault, supply and occupation. The movement could damage government positions, but it could not always convert damage into territorial control.

Scattered helmets and burned-out vehicles after an APLA shell hit the local AAF garrison depot, Panochori, 1976.

The AAF Adapts

On APLA's eastern flank, the beginning of 1976 was marked by stalemate. Both sides held difficult ground, and neither could move the line easily. In May, however, the AAF carried out a successful operation against Poliakko and retook the town. This marked the beginning of a more cautious and methodical government approach in the south.

In June, AAF forces attempted to advance toward Zaros from the direction of the Xirolimni dam and through Poliakko. The first effort stalled. The terrain favoured APLA: swampy thickets, hills and the forests around Zaros limited movement and provided cover for ambushes. The AAF halted the offensive in mid-June. Unlike the hurried counterattacks of April 1975, however, this pause did not mark the end of the effort.

APLA fighters at a firing position near Zaros, 1976.

A month later, the offensive resumed with a different method. Instead of relying on large road-bound columns, the AAF advanced slowly, using smaller manoeuvre groups under heavy artillery and air support. The approach was less dramatic but more effective. It reduced the vulnerability of government forces to ambush and allowed them to clear ground gradually rather than attempt a rapid breakthrough.

By the end of 1976, this method had produced the AAF's most important success of the year. Government forces retook Therisa, recovered the Altis Aeroclub airfield and reached Drimea. In doing so, they effectively cut the APLA front into two parts. The achievement did not destroy APLA, and it did not end the southern war, but it changed the balance. For the first time since the fall of Zaros, the regime had shown that it could learn from earlier failures and conduct a sustained counteroffensive in difficult terrain.

AAF tank near the Xirolimni Dam prior to an attack, 1976.

Terror and Reprisal

Away from the front lines, the war became harsher. APLA continued its island-wide campaign of raids and urban attacks, but in 1976 its methods increasingly crossed into terrorism. Policemen and judges were assassinated. Bombs and car bombs exploded in towns and cities. The targets were often connected to the state, but the effects were not limited to the security apparatus. At least sixty-four civilians and seventeen AAF security personnel were killed in terrorist attacks during the year.

The junta used these attacks to justify a wider campaign of repression. National Guard brigades were given greater freedom to act against suspected left-wing networks. Their raids became more violent and less restrained. Extrajudicial executions of left-wing sympathisers, and of people merely suspected of sympathy, became more open. In some cases, victims were killed only a few kilometres from the settlements where they had been seized. Bodies were left in ditches, fields or forest belts without serious effort to conceal them.

This pattern deepened the war's social damage. APLA's attacks hardened the regime and frightened civilians who might otherwise have opposed the junta. National Guard reprisals pushed more families toward the insurgency and confirmed the belief, especially in left-wing and refugee communities, that the state no longer offered even the appearance of legal protection. Violence outside the front lines therefore became self-sustaining. Each side used the other's methods to justify its own escalation.

The consequences were political as well as military. The ARF regarded APLA's urban terror with growing unease. Its leaders feared that indiscriminate violence would discredit the anti-junta struggle and make it easier for the regime to describe all opposition as communist terror. APLA, in turn, saw the ARF as cautious to the point of passivity. From the APLA perspective, the southern front carried the main burden of the war while the ARF accumulated strength in the north.

The Strains Within the Resistance

By the end of 1976, the war had entered a more complex phase. The AAF still controlled the state, the main cities and much of the island's road network, but it had failed to restore full territorial authority. The ARF held Oreokastro and Frini, maintained a growing supply network and prepared the ground for operations toward Syrta, Abdera and the Pyrsos area. APLA retained a powerful presence in the south and west, but its front had been split by the AAF advance toward Drimea.

The two insurgent movements remained formally aligned against the junta, but their wartime experiences were diverging. The ARF had grown through patience, defections and cautious territorial consolidation. APLA had grown through offensive action, foreign support, artillery, urban cells and heavy sacrifice. Each method produced results, but each also produced resentment. ARF commanders believed time and preparation would create the conditions for a decisive northern campaign. APLA commanders believed the war was being paid for in the south while the ARF waited.

The regime's own evolution added another layer. The AAF had begun to adapt militarily, especially in the south, while the National Guard became a more central instrument of intimidation and reprisal. The war was no longer defined only by the first rebel enclaves of 1975. It now included fortified towns, contested heights, clandestine ports, terror attacks, disappearances, executions and growing rivalry inside the resistance.

The first two years of the civil war therefore ended without decision. The junta had survived, but it had not restored order. APLA had expanded, but at the cost of heavy losses and increasing political isolation. The ARF had strengthened, but its caution had begun to alienate its revolutionary ally. The conditions for a larger rupture were already present. In 1977, they would become impossible to contain.

APLA militiamen during the raid on Dorida, 1976.

The Position at the Beginning of the Year

The first two years of the civil war had changed the military balance on Altis without producing a decision. The AAF still controlled the state, the largest cities and the formal instruments of government, but it had lost the ability to impose its authority everywhere at once. The war had forced it to defend roads, airfields, ports, mountain positions and towns across several disconnected fronts. By the beginning of 1977, this strain was visible in both equipment and planning.

The army had lost part of the mechanised strength on which it had depended in 1975. Deliveries through AFMC channels covered current needs, but they could not fully restore the vehicles and equipment lost in the first campaigns. The air force had also suffered. The appearance of Strela-2 missiles in APLA hands during 1976 had made low-level operations more dangerous and contributed to the loss of up to a quarter of the available aircraft fleet. The AAF remained the strongest force on the island, but it could no longer assume that armour and aviation would solve every operational problem.

The regime's main attention at the start of 1977 remained on the south. Its objective was to take Zaros and isolate APLA's regular forces between Zaros and Panochori. This priority was understandable. APLA had been weakened in 1976, but it still held important ground and possessed enough manpower and heavy weapons to resist a direct assault. Its positions used terrain, recoilless rifles, heavy machine guns and light anti-aircraft weapons to compensate for losses. The AAF therefore expected another difficult campaign in the south.

The ARF used this situation. During 1976 it had accumulated weapons, expanded clandestine supply routes and strengthened its control over the northern interior. At the beginning of 1977, it distributed these resources for its largest campaign of the war. To isolate the future battlefield, ARF groups secretly occupied heights between Syrta and Agios Dionysios. Other heights around the operational area were already under ARF control. When the final preparations were complete, the movement kept its presence hidden. The offensive was planned for February.

APLA did not know of the ARF plan. Its own position was becoming dangerous. AAF control of Drimea had disrupted its logistics, Zaros Bay could no longer be used effectively, and Edessa Bay had always been under government fire control. Supplies could still enter through the remote bay of Naftia, but they could not easily reach Zaros while Drimea remained in enemy hands. APLA therefore sought a way to disperse AAF forces before attempting to restore its southern front. Its leadership chose the eastern cities and prepared a major urban operation against Pyrgos, the capital of the military regime.

APLA fighters load into a vehicle somewhere in eastern Altis, 1977.

The Pyrgos Raid

APLA fighters during the first day of fighting in Pyrgos.

APLA fighters began infiltrating Pyrgos in late January. On 28 January, the movement launched an open uprising in Charkia and took the town. The action was designed to distract the AAF garrison at Pyrgos and create uncertainty about the direction of the coming attack. On 2 February, APLA began fighting inside Pyrgos and on its outskirts, opening the attack from the unexpected direction of Dorida.

The raid lasted more than a week. It was one of APLA's most ambitious urban operations, but it did not produce the strategic effect the movement had intended. The fighting caused civilian deaths and heavy damage to parts of the city. APLA used harsh methods, and the AAF responded with equal severity. Government forces used artillery and air support on the outskirts of the city, despite the risk to urban districts. Most of the APLA fighters involved were killed. The few who were captured were soon executed as terrorists.

The AAF suppressed the Pyrgos fighting largely with local forces. Aviation was diverted from the southern front, but aircraft had already been used there more cautiously because of APLA's air-defence weapons. The raid became a tragedy for the population of Altis, but it did not force the redeployment APLA had hoped for. Its wider consequences came indirectly. The operation created confusion, absorbed attention and provided the ARF with an opportunity to begin its own offensive earlier than planned.

ARF fighters engaging an AAF helicopter near Galati, February 1977.

The Northern Offensive

On 4 February, ARF forces opened their campaign. The offensive struck two principal targets: the airfield south of Abdera and the village of Galati. At the same time, approaches to Syrta were blocked, and ARF fighters who had previously entered the town moved to contain the local garrison. The aim was not simply to seize ground, but to paralyse the AAF's ability to react across the entire Syrta-Abdera-Pyrsos sector.

The airfield south of Abdera fell in less than a day. The capture was a major material success. The ARF seized heavy weapons, including howitzers and mortars, as well as helicopters, anti-aircraft gun and machine-gun mounts, and several light armoured vehicles, including AML-90s. These trophies gave the movement a level of firepower it had not possessed before and allowed it to sustain the campaign without waiting for foreign deliveries.

The ARF did not attempt to storm the garrison in Syrta. Instead, it kept the garrison blocked and used its presence as an operational constraint on the AAF. Government forces on Mount Pyrsos could not support Syrta freely with fire, because ARF units and army troops were too close together. The blocked garrison also offered political possibilities. ARF commanders hoped that exhaustion, isolation and the movement's reputation for accepting defectors would lead at least part of the force to surrender or change sides.

Galati fell to the ARF on 8 February. Two days later, with artillery support and several helicopter strikes, the ARF captured a height adjacent to the village. Mount Pyrsos itself remained under AAF control, and surviving government troops withdrew either to Pyrsos or to Abdera. The offensive had not yet destroyed the AAF position, but it had broken its outer structure and forced the regime into a defensive posture.

Pyrsos, Abdera and Syrta

The following month was dominated by siege warfare. ARF forces surrounded and shelled the government positions at Pyrsos and Abdera, while blocking the approaches to the combat zone. They avoided costly direct assaults. The method was consistent with the ARF's earlier practice: use terrain, captured weapons and isolation to exhaust the enemy rather than spend limited manpower on frontal attacks.

Government troops attempted to retake Galati, but the approaches to the village were dominated by ARF-held heights. The AAF could not concentrate enough force without exposing its columns and supply lines. The garrisons at Pyrsos and Abdera held out for weeks, but by the middle of March they were exhausted and nearly out of ammunition. When the positions finally fell, most of their defenders were captured.

The Syrta garrison remained blocked behind ARF lines. Its continued presence had been useful during the earlier phase of the operation, but after the fall of Pyrsos and Abdera it no longer had any prospect of relief. The ARF left it isolated while it prepared to exploit the collapse of the northern AAF position.

The result was a major defeat for the regime. Galati and Abdera had fallen, Pyrsos had been lost, and Syrta was effectively neutralised. The ARF now possessed captured artillery, helicopters, anti-aircraft weapons and armoured vehicles. More importantly, it had created the conditions for a move into the centre of the island.

ARF fighters pass a destroyed AAF vehicle on the Syrta–Agios Dionysios road, March 1977.

Agios Dionysios

In the second half of March, the ARF used its newly captured weapons to launch a rapid advance toward Agios Dionysios. The city was taken quickly. During the final days of March, fighting continued in the surrounding area as ARF units blocked the main highway and secured the approaches. The Syrta garrison surrendered in full strength soon afterward.

The fall of Agios Dionysios was more than another northern defeat. It was a strategic crisis for the AAF. The city stood on the island's main transport artery. Its capture effectively cut Kore, Topolia, Negades and Kavala off from the rest of Altis. The regime had lost not only several positions, but the continuity of its central communications.

The AAF could not respond in an organised way. Its major forces were concentrated farther south, while part of its available strength had been drawn toward Pyrgos during the APLA raid. The army now faced the hardest operational choice of the war so far. To restore the north-centre, it would have to weaken the southern front. To continue the southern campaign, it would have to accept the isolation of key areas around Kavala and Kore. For the first time, the AAF's inability to concentrate everywhere became a strategic defeat rather than an operational inconvenience.

The ARF victory also changed the movement's political status. Until then, it had been seen as a cautious insurgency that held mountain areas and conducted raids. After Agios Dionysios, it controlled a major communications point and large quantities of captured equipment. Its foreign support increased, partly because sympathisers abroad now saw the movement as a force capable of real military success.

ARF fighter moving through Agios Dionysios, March 1977.

The Southern Front Reopens

APLA fighters during the Therisa offensive, February 1977.

APLA benefited from the northern crisis, though not in the way its commanders had planned. The Pyrgos raid had failed to draw sufficient AAF forces away from the south. The ARF offensive did what the raid could not. As the regime shifted attention northward to deal with the collapse around Abdera, Syrta and Agios Dionysios, the southern front weakened.

On 16 February, APLA retook Drimea and Therisa and recovered the Altis Aeroclub airfield. From the middle of February into early March, fighting continued around Poliakko and Katalaki. The AAF still resisted, but its ability to hold the line was declining as the northern emergency worsened. After the fall of Agios Dionysios, the government front in this direction broke more widely. APLA forces pushed toward Alikampos and the heights north of it.

These successes restored much of APLA's logistical position. The movement had entered the year close to a crisis; by spring it had recovered territory lost in late 1976 and expanded into new ground. MEC-linked deliveries continued and helped rebuild its strength. The improvement, however, did not reduce tension with the ARF. APLA's gains had been made possible in large part by the northern offensive, while APLA's own costly operation in Pyrgos had failed to achieve its purpose. This imbalance intensified the resentment already present since 1976.

APLA also tried to disrupt the developing ceasefire arrangements between the ARF and AAF by moving toward the main highway. The heights south of Agios Dionysios were already controlled by ARF forces, and APLA did not yet risk open confrontation with its ally. The contest remained limited, but the direction was clear. Agios Dionysios had become not only a strategic point on the map, but also the centre of the emerging struggle between the two insurgent movements.

The Ceasefire and Orino

On 3 April, the ARF and AAF concluded a humanitarian ceasefire. The agreement allowed the transfer of AAF prisoners and wounded, and the delivery of humanitarian cargo to Syrta. Agios Dionysios became the logistical centre for this movement of people and supplies. For the ARF, the ceasefire had political value. It showed that the movement could hold a major city, manage prisoners and act as a responsible national force rather than a revolutionary underground. For the AAF, it offered time, relief for wounded personnel and a chance to reduce the immediate human cost of the northern disaster.

APLA viewed the agreement differently. After two years of heavy fighting in the south, the image of ARF forces negotiating with the regime was difficult to accept. To APLA commanders, the ceasefire suggested that the ARF was preparing to convert military success into political legitimacy at the expense of revolutionary unity. This interpretation would soon be reinforced by events beyond the control of either insurgent command.

On 8 April, forces of the 5th Brigade of the National Guard moved from Athira through Koroni toward Orino. The timing was deliberate. The ceasefire had created confusion and traffic congestion along the main highway. AAF forces had withdrawn from some positions, and ARF units had not yet moved to secure Orino. The National Guardsmen used the humanitarian pause to strike a settlement that was both vulnerable and politically symbolic.

Orino had been an economic project of the Papatsis period and a successful example of refugee integration into Altian society. It was prosperous, politically meaningful and associated with communities the right had long treated with suspicion. By attacking it during the ceasefire, the 5th Brigade could strike at the refugee population and at the credibility of the ARF at the same time. The settlement lay in an area whose security, in theory, should have been guaranteed by the new ARF presence.

The raid became a massacre. Men were gathered in the centre of the settlement, locked inside houses and burned alive. Surviving women and children were forced to march toward Agios Dionysios. When ARF units saw smoke rising from Orino, they moved immediately toward the village, but they arrived about an hour later. The National Guardsmen had already left. At least ninety people had been killed, and the settlement had been destroyed.

The ceasefire collapsed. Orino did not simply add another atrocity to the war. It destroyed the political meaning of the humanitarian pause. The ARF had tried to demonstrate discipline and responsibility; the 5th Brigade turned that pause into a weapon against the refugee population and against cooperation inside the resistance. For APLA, Orino confirmed every warning about negotiation with the junta. For the ARF, it revealed how easily the National Guard could exploit any attempt to impose rules on the conflict.

Ruins of the former settlement of Orino, early 1980s.

The Kore–Aggelochori Line

After the shock of April, the war did not return to the fast movement of February and March. During late spring and summer, the ARF tried to expand its position without exposing itself to a destructive conventional battle. In May, it took Agios Konstantinos and Mount Amani north-east of Kore. These gains allowed the movement to threaten the Kore-Aggelochori valley, where large AAF forces remained concentrated.

The ARF command considered a direct advance into the valley too dangerous. The area contained fortified military bases, strong government forces and geography favourable to defenders. A frontal campaign there would have risked heavy losses and the destruction of towns caught between both sides. The natural method was therefore gradual: seize the heights overlooking the valley and reduce the AAF position by pressure rather than direct assault.

The battle for Kore and Negades developed from this logic. Negades became, in practice, a neutral and exposed zone. To the north, the heights around Agios Konstantinos were under ARF control. To the south, Mount Magos remained in AAF hands and dominated much of the region. Artillery duels and limited attacks made the town increasingly difficult to hold as a normal civilian settlement. Neither side could fully control it without exposing itself to the other’s fire.

Kore presented a similar problem. The ARF controlled the northern approaches and could move significant forces toward the town, but the AAF still held substantial strength there. An open battle between the two forces would likely have destroyed the town. Fighting therefore concentrated on the northern outskirts and along the highway between Agios Dionysios and Kore. Through the summer and autumn, the area became a positional front of artillery fire, patrol clashes and limited attacks rather than decisive manoeuvre.

The Southern and Western Fronts

AAF fighters at a machine-gun position near Kore, 1977.

In the south, APLA used the recovery of its logistics to consolidate. During late spring and summer, it strengthened the positions regained earlier in the year and continued slower fighting with AAF forces around the approaches west of Katalaki, in the suburbs of Neochori. The movement had regained much of its confidence, but its strategic attention increasingly shifted toward Agios Dionysios. Control of the city would give APLA access to the main highway and deny the ARF the central prize of the spring campaign.

In August, APLA began fighting for the southern heights of Agios Dionysios. This marked the beginning of its offensive against the ARF. The clashes were still limited, and both sides tried to avoid announcing a formal war against the other. The political reality was nevertheless clear. The two principal anti-junta organisations were now contesting terrain against one another while continuing to fight the regime.

The AAF used this fragmentation to stabilise its most important areas. The pressure on Panochori declined during 1977, allowing the regime to turn the outskirts of Kavala into a heavily fortified zone. Government forces strengthened the Kore-Aggelochori valley, reinforced Mount Agia Stemma and began forming mountain infantry units suited to the new character of the war. These formations helped control the heights from Agia Stemma to Kavrida and gave the AAF a better tool for fighting in terrain where ordinary mechanised units had repeatedly struggled.

On the western flank of the APLA front, skirmishes developed over individual heights and observation points. These engagements were often small, involving limited numbers of men and producing few immediate changes on the map. Their importance lay in the slow militarisation of the landscape. Heights, tracks and ridges became front-line assets. The AAF was learning to hold terrain in a way it had not done in 1975, while APLA and ARF were increasingly forced to defend their own zones against more than one enemy.

The End of the Anti-Junta Front

By the end of 1977, every major force on Altis had changed. The AAF had suffered one of the worst defeats of the war, but it had not collapsed. Its commanders understood that the army had to change its methods, rebuild its strength and reduce dependence on rapid mechanised thrusts. Fortified zones, mountain troops, tighter control of key valleys and new sources of equipment became more important than the assumption that the state could retake lost areas by force of superiority alone.

The ARF emerged from 1977 with the largest territory it had ever controlled. It held Agios Dionysios, had expanded its northern and western positions, and possessed large quantities of captured weapons and equipment. Its success increased foreign sympathy and support. Yet its political victory had been damaged by Orino and by the conflict over the southern heights of Agios Dionysios. The movement had tried to behave like a responsible national authority, but the conditions of the war made such authority fragile.

APLA also ended the year stronger in territorial terms than it had begun it. It had recovered ground lost in 1976, restored parts of its logistics and expanded toward Alikampos and the central heights. MEC and Eastern Bloc support gave it more weapons and allowed it to continue the war despite heavy losses. At the same time, its raid on Pyrgos, its use of urban terror and its offensive against ARF-held ground deepened its political isolation from the non-communist resistance.

The anti-junta front did not formally end in a single declaration. It broke through events. The Pyrgos raid, the ARF offensive, the ceasefire, Orino and the fighting south of Agios Dionysios all made the old alliance impossible to preserve. The resistance had won its greatest victories in 1977, but those victories destroyed its unity. From that point onward, the civil war was no longer a struggle between the junta and two allied insurgent movements. It had become a multi-sided war, fought by forces that increasingly feared one another almost as much as they feared the regime.

THE WAR ECONOMY, 1978–1979

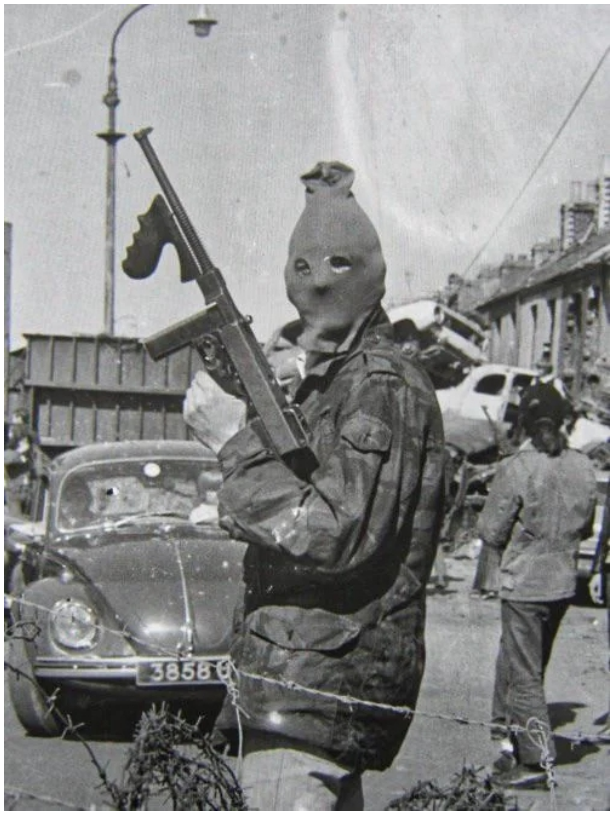
After the Break

The events of 1977 did not end the war. They changed its structure. The AAF had suffered a major defeat in the north and centre, but it remained the army of the state. The ARF had gained territory, equipment and political weight, but now faced pressure from both the regime and APLA. APLA had restored much of its southern position, but its relationship with the ARF had moved from rivalry to open armed contest. The anti-junta front had broken, and the war no longer had a single political shape.

The front lines after 1977 were less fluid than the events of February and March had suggested. The major forces were too damaged, too dispersed and too dependent on difficult logistics to conduct continuous large offensives. The war became a contest of heights, roads, ports and supply points. In some places, it resembled a conventional front. In others, it was a network of ambushes, smuggling routes, checkpoints and fortified villages.

This change made the economy of the war more important. Weapons, fuel, food, medicine, vehicles, spare parts and foreign currency became as decisive as battalions. Every faction needed supplies it could not produce. Every faction depended on ports, smugglers, foreign patrons or captured stockpiles. As the fighting continued, the line between military logistics and private enrichment became increasingly difficult to define.

By 1978, the civil war had created its own markets. Some were controlled by insurgent movements. Some were protected by pro-government militias. Others existed in the spaces between official authority and criminal enterprise. The war destroyed normal economic life, but it also created opportunities for those able to move goods across front lines, through ports or under the protection of armed men.



Pro-government militiaman at a makeshift roadblock in Kalithea.

Weapons and Roads

The most valuable commodity was weapons. Arms entered Altis through foreign deliveries, clandestine coastal points, captured depots and corrupted army channels. Rifles, machine guns, mortars, ammunition and spare parts moved between factions with a regularity that official propaganda could not explain. Ideology mattered less in these exchanges than access, payment and risk.

A scandal in June 1979 revealed part of this system. An AAF officer from the garrison near Telos was arrested for selling weapons to the ARF. The quantities involved were not large, but the case was politically sensitive. The weapons had been sold to an enemy force, and trucks carrying the cargo had moved through Athira toward Frini. The investigation uncovered bribery among several officers and raised questions about how army weapons could pass through areas influenced by the 5th Brigade of the National Guard without interference.

The junta’s judicial authorities suspected connivance by the 5th Brigade, but the brigade was formally cleared. Its commanders argued that they had no jurisdiction to inspect or register army cargo movements. This defence was legally useful and politically convenient. It did not answer the larger question of whether men connected to the Vakardis network had taken money to ignore the traffic. That question remained unresolved.

The Telos case mattered because it showed how the war economy crossed political lines. The AAF fought the ARF at the front, but parts of its own apparatus supplied the enemy for profit. Athira, already associated with the 5th Brigade and with the wider influence of Kostas Vakardis, became a place where army logistics, private interests and insurgent supply intersected. The state could still arrest individual officers, but it could not easily separate the war from the market the war had created.

Fuel, Power and Hunger

Fuel was the second great commodity of the war. It moved tanks, trucks and generators, but it also kept civilian life from collapsing entirely. Diesel engines powered local electricity stations, water pumps, fishing boats, workshops and hospital equipment. In areas where roads were insecure and formal supply systems had broken down, a fuel convoy could have the political value of a military operation.

The AAF was less dependent on private suppliers than many civilian authorities. The regime established independent fuel channels through Gulf states, and from 1978 onward it increasingly received supplies through Eastern Bloc countries as well. Structures connected to Vakardis and other companies remained important, but the army was not wholly captive to them. Civilians were in a weaker position. They depended on whoever controlled the road, the port, the generator or the next shipment.

Electricity became a political instrument. Many of the island's wind generators were located in territories controlled by the ARF and APLA. The ARF continued supplying electricity to civilian infrastructure even outside areas under its direct control. This policy was not purely humanitarian. It helped the movement present itself as a national authority capable of preserving public services. It also separated the ARF from APLA in the eyes of many civilians and foreign observers.

APLA took a harder line. It cut electricity links to areas outside its control and treated infrastructure as part of the battlefield. The decision reflected both ideology and military calculation. Resources were to serve the revolutionary zone first, and communities under regime or ARF authority were not to benefit from assets held by APLA. The policy strengthened APLA's internal control, but it deepened resentment in areas dependent on its infrastructure.

Food and humanitarian supplies followed the same pattern. Aid shipments were seized, stolen, redirected or secretly re-registered by independent merchants, local commanders and armed groups. Even after some of these groups were formally subordinated to the army, they continued to treat aid as a source of income. Food could be exchanged for fuel, fuel for ammunition, ammunition for loyalty. In such conditions, hunger was not only the result of shortage. It was also the result of control.

AAF fuel convoy on a rural road, 1970s.

Antiquities and Opium

The war economy reached beyond military goods. Altis contained archaeological sites and historical material from Roman, Arab, Byzantine and Ottoman periods. As state authority weakened, excavation sites were looted and private collections disappeared. Artefacts left the island through clandestine ports, fishing routes, corrupt officials and foreign intermediaries. The damage was not only economic. The war consumed part of the island's past.

No faction could claim complete innocence. Local smugglers, officials, militia commanders and insurgent networks all had access to routes through which cultural objects could be moved. Some objects were sold to raise hard currency. Others were used as payment to intermediaries who could obtain weapons, medical supplies or transport. Archaeological damage became one more sign that the war had broken the distinction between public inheritance and private survival.

Drug trafficking developed along similar routes. Opium from Turkey moved through several Altian ports, including Agia Triada, which lay under Vakardis influence, and even the government port at Pyrgos. The trade required protection, documents, storage and transport. These could be provided by businessmen, port officials, armed groups or elements of the security apparatus. Unconfirmed reports suggested that parts of the junta itself profited from the traffic.

APLA also entered the drug economy as its external support became less reliable. The movement needed foreign currency to replace weapons, fuel and ammunition that no longer arrived in sufficient quantity through older channels. Participation in trafficking did not fit the public language of revolutionary struggle, but the war had already made ideological purity expensive. By 1979, opium, antiquities and weapons were part of the same shadow system: commodities moved through violence, protected by politics and justified by necessity.

Territorial Defence

The regime attempted to bring order to its own irregular forces through the creation of Territorial Defence. A general order of the junta formalised many scattered pro-government militias by assigning them military unit numbers and attaching army officers to their commands. On paper, this gave the AAF a wider security structure and placed local armed groups under General Staff authority.

The process was uneven. In some places, attached army officers were accepted as useful links to supplies and legitimacy. In others, they were treated with suspicion or open hostility. Many militia commanders had built power through local patronage, intimidation, smuggling and personal loyalty. They did not easily surrender authority to officers sent from the army. Over the following two years, working relationships were established, but they were often based on compromise rather than discipline.

The compromise was simple. Territorial Defence accepted army subordination, and the army ignored many illegal actions by its new soldiers. Raids, theft, private taxation, smuggling and violence against suspected sympathisers continued. The AAF needed these forces to guard roads, villages, warehouses and rear areas. The Territorial Defence needed the army's recognition, weapons and protection. Both sides understood the bargain.

Altian Territorial Defence fighter, late 1970s.

Supply shortages reinforced the problem. Territorial Defence units were often expected to arm and maintain themselves. This encouraged commanders to acquire weapons through private purchases, captured stocks or diversion from official channels. The more the regime relied on local armed groups, the more those groups became embedded in the war economy. The state had tried to absorb the militias. Instead, it legalised much of their autonomy.

Stratis

The AAF's search for new support changed the international position of the war. After the defeats of 1977, the regime could no longer rely only on AFMC-linked channels, private intermediaries and remaining domestic resources. From 1978, it began to reorient part of its logistics toward the Eastern Bloc. This did not mean ideological alignment. The junta remained anti-communist. The relationship was strategic and transactional.

For the Eastern Bloc, the AAF offered what APLA could not: state infrastructure. The army still controlled major ports, airfields, administrative systems and communications. It could grant access, sign agreements and host facilities. APLA was ideologically closer, but it could not provide the same geographic or technical value. The result was a gradual shift in priorities. Support for APLA became less important than the opportunity to use the Altis theatre for wider regional purposes.

Stratis became the first link in this infrastructure intervention. The nearby island offered space for radar complexes, port facilities and controlled military installations. Agreements were reached for the secret deployment of long-range S-200 surface-to-air missile systems on Stratis. These systems were never transferred to Altis and were not placed under AAF control. Altian officers were not admitted to them. Their presence served Eastern Bloc requirements more than Altian ones.

At the same time, the AAF began receiving S-75 Dvina air-defence systems from 1978 onward. These were deployed on Altis and gave the regime a new layer of protection against air attack and external pressure. The combination was politically significant. On Altis, the AAF received useful military equipment. On Stratis, the Eastern Bloc established a deeper and less visible strategic presence.

The full implications were not immediately understood. Rumours of Soviet-controlled air defence on Stratis spread slowly and became more serious by 1980. When they did, they sharply changed AFMC perceptions of the junta. A regime that had once been treated as a difficult but usable partner now appeared to be opening the island system to Eastern Bloc military infrastructure. This shift would have consequences beyond the 1978–79 period.

APLA Abandoned

The same process weakened APLA. The movement did not lose all external support at once. MEC continued to assist it, and some deliveries still arrived. But the broader Eastern Bloc programme began to shrink as Moscow's attention shifted toward the AAF and the opportunities offered by state infrastructure.

APLA felt the change first in anti-aircraft weapons. Deliveries of man-portable air-defence systems and anti-aircraft guns declined. Artillery ammunition also became less reliable. Fuel supplies were cut off entirely through the older channels, forcing MEC to cover as much of the shortage as it could. The movement remained armed and dangerous, but the type of support that had allowed it to challenge AAF air power and sustain heavy fire became harder to obtain.

APLA fighter with a Strela-2 MANPADS.

This had military and political effects. APLA had built part of its identity on being the revolutionary army with foreign backing, modern weapons and a connection to the socialist world. The reduction of aid exposed the limits of that relationship. Moscow's strategic interest in Altis did not depend on APLA's victory. If the AAF could provide ports, radar sites, air-defence positions and access to Stratis, then an anti-communist regime could become more useful than a communist insurgency.

The sense of abandonment hardened APLA's leadership. It increased dependence on MEC and on the movement's own sources of revenue, including participation in the drug economy. It also intensified hostility toward the ARF. APLA commanders saw the non-communist resistance gaining foreign sympathy and captured equipment while their own external channels narrowed. The ideological war inside the insurgency was therefore reinforced by logistics.

The Static Fronts, 1978

The military situation in 1978 reflected these pressures. Large movements were rare, but fighting continued across several fronts. Around Agios Dionysios, APLA and ARF fought for the surrounding heights. The clashes were often limited in scale, but they confirmed that the split of 1977 had become a military fact. Both movements still fought the regime, but they also contested the same roads, hills and supply routes.

In the south, APLA captured Neochori and engaged AAF forces around Stavros. The fighting did not produce a decisive breakthrough. APLA had recovered from the crisis of late 1976, but it lacked the resources for a sustained offensive across all sectors. The AAF, adapting to the terrain, avoided unnecessary movement and tried to hold defensible positions while rebuilding its structure.

On APLA's western flank, mountain fighting continued between APLA and AAF forces. Neither side could secure a clear victory. The terrain favoured small detachments, observation posts, ambushes and low-intensity firefights rather than decisive battle. Positions on individual heights mattered because they controlled tracks, villages and artillery observation. The front became a slow contest of endurance.

The ARF also faced strain. Growing APLA pressure near Agios Dionysios forced it to pull resources away from other sectors. At the same time, the AAF increased pressure on Mount Amani. By the end of 1978, ARF forces were holding the mountain with difficulty. The movement had gained much in 1977, but its position was now stretched between the AAF, APLA and the need to defend a large territory with limited manpower.

Agios Dionysios Again, 1979

At the beginning of 1979, the ARF abandoned Mount Amani and withdrew forces toward Syrta and Mount Agios Minas. The decision was a recognition of limits. Holding Amani had become too costly, especially while APLA continued to pressure Agios Dionysios. The withdrawal gave the AAF room to rebuild its position, but it also preserved ARF strength for the defence of its core areas.

In the spring, the battle for Stavros ended. APLA withdrew to Neochori, and the AAF chose not to storm the town. The decision reflected the regime's changing approach. A direct assault would have risked destroying the town and producing heavy losses for limited gain. Instead, government forces consolidated in Stavros and accepted a local line that could be defended.

APLA's major success came later in the year, when it captured Agios Dionysios. The city had already become the symbol of the broken anti-junta front. Its capture by APLA denied the ARF the central prize of the 1977 campaign and gave APLA control of a key point on the main highway. For the movement, it was both a military achievement and a political statement. APLA had shown that it could challenge not only the regime, but also its former ally.

APLA fighter in Orino, 1979.

The victory encouraged overreach. APLA held Agios Dionysios for roughly half a year and then began pushing recklessly toward Syrta. The advance brought its forces as far as the ruins of Orino. The symbolism was obvious. Orino had been the site where the humanitarian ceasefire of 1977 was destroyed and where the unity of the resistance became impossible to preserve. For APLA, reaching the ruins gave political meaning to the offensive. For the ARF, it confirmed that APLA was willing to turn memory into a weapon.

The ARF did not try to match APLA with a large counteroffensive. Throughout 1979, its main task was to hold its existing lines. It fought defensively and inflicted losses when opponents attacked. APLA's movement toward Syrta was met with heavy fire and ambushes, and the attackers suffered serious casualties. The ARF's withdrawal from Agios Dionysios had served two purposes: it avoided a costly fight for a city under growing pressure, and it allowed AAF and APLA to collide over the same ground.

The Road Restored

AAF tank during the Agios Dionysios offensive, 1979.

By autumn 1979, the AAF was ready to act. After restoring control over Mount Amani and consolidating its positions around Kore and Stavros, the regime organised a simultaneous offensive against Agios Dionysios from the directions of Kore and Lakka. The aim was to restore the main transport artery and break APLA's hold over the city before it could become a permanent base.

The operation showed how much the AAF had changed since the early years of the war. It did not rely on a single armoured thrust along an exposed road. It used converging pressure, artillery, local superiority and the terrain recovered during the previous year. The AAF could not yet defeat all its enemies at once, but it had learned to choose objectives that restored operational coherence.

Agios Dionysios fell back into government hands. The main road was reopened, and the AAF restored a measure of continuity between the central and eastern parts of the island. The victory did not erase the defeats of 1977, but it reversed one of their most damaging consequences. It also weakened APLA's claim that the capture of the city marked a new stage in the revolutionary war.

For the ARF, the result was acceptable. It had lost direct control over a major communications point, but it had preserved its forces and watched two enemies exhaust one another. Its defensive posture in 1979 reflected a broader strategic choice. The movement no longer sought dramatic expansion. It intended to survive, hold Syrta, Frini, Oreokastro and the surrounding heights, and wait for the regime and APLA to spend strength elsewhere.

The System of War

By the end of 1979, the civil war had become self-sustaining. The fronts moved, but not enough to decide the conflict. Foreign powers supplied weapons, but not enough to give any faction a final victory. Smugglers, officers, militia commanders, businessmen and insurgent representatives had all learned to profit from continuation. The war economy did not replace the military struggle; it kept it alive.

The AAF had begun to rebuild through Eastern Bloc channels, air-defence systems and the formalisation of Territorial Defence. The price was dependence on forces and partners it could not fully control. The ARF had gained support and equipment, but its territory required constant defence. APLA had recovered from crisis and briefly held Agios Dionysios, but the decline of broader Eastern Bloc aid made its future more uncertain. FIA and the Vakardis network had not yet broken openly from the regime, but their place in the economy of the war was already too large to ignore.

AAF troops near the Altis main highway during the battle for Agios Dionysios, 1979.

For civilians, the period brought little relief. Electricity, fuel, food and medicine became instruments of power. Aid could be stolen before it reached the hungry. Archaeological sites could be looted to buy weapons. Ports could move opium, ammunition and humanitarian cargo in the same season. Every road had a price, and every armed group could become a customs authority.

The war of 1978–1979 therefore did not produce a decisive campaign. It produced a system. By the time the decade ended, Altis was no longer simply divided by front lines. It was divided by supply networks, foreign patrons, black markets and armed economies. These networks gave every faction the means to continue fighting, but not the means to win.

The Open Market

By the beginning of 1980, Athira had become more than a rear-area town under National Guard influence. It was the centre of a political and economic network that the junta could no longer fully control. The 5th Brigade of the National Guard was formally part of the regime's security structure, but in practice it had become the armed protector of the Vakardis system: a combination of militia power, nationalist politics, private property, foreign contacts, smuggling routes and military supply.

The arms trade in Athira was no longer simply a clandestine activity hidden in warehouses and isolated coves. Weapons were bought and sold with a visibility that alarmed even those officials who had tolerated corruption throughout the war. Rifles, ammunition, machine guns, spare parts and captured equipment moved through courtyards, garages, workshops and side streets under the protection of men loyal to the 5th Brigade. Some transactions remained secret, but the market itself had become an open fact. Athira was a place where the state's monopoly on violence could be bought, rented or redirected.

The scandal of June 1979 had already shown how far this system had reached. An AAF officer from the garrison near Telos had been arrested for selling weapons to the ARF, with trucks moving through Athira toward Frini. The case did not prove direct involvement by the 5th Brigade, and the brigade's commanders argued that they had no authority to inspect army cargo. Legally, the defence was sufficient. Politically, it satisfied almost no one inside the General Staff.

The problem was not only corruption. Many officers in the AAF believed that the 5th Brigade had become a state within the state. It had its own base, its own intelligence network, its own suppliers, its own political movement and its own economy. Kostas Vakardis remained useful to the regime because of his contacts with AFMC, his ability to obtain weapons and materials, and his influence among the most militant anti-communist forces on the island. Yet the same qualities made him dangerous. The 5th Brigade did not merely serve the junta. It served the interests of the Vakardis family and the FIA.

This did not mean that the National Guard as a whole was disintegrating. The National Guard remained a wider structure, composed of several brigades, with police forces also tied into its system. Other brigades continued to serve the regime and remained valuable to the AAF as fanatical, politically reliable forces. The crisis of 1980 concerned the 5th Brigade specifically. It was the most autonomous, the most economically embedded and the most closely tied to a private political network. If the junta could not discipline it, the entire pro-government camp would learn that loyalty had become negotiable.

Weapons and ammunition laid out for sale in Athira, 1980.

APLA's Last Window

While the pro-government camp moved toward internal crisis, APLA entered 1980 in a worsening military position. The capture of Agios Dionysios in 1979 had been a major achievement, but the city had been lost again by autumn. Its brief occupation had not reversed the movement's deeper problems. The reduction of Eastern Bloc support had left APLA increasingly dependent on MEC and on its own sources of revenue. Supplies of man-portable air-defence systems, anti-aircraft guns and artillery ammunition had declined. Fuel had to be replaced through MEC channels and through the shadow economy.

The final break between AAF and AFMC did not help APLA. On the surface, APLA propaganda could describe the conflict between the junta and the 5th Brigade as proof that the "fascists were devouring each other." In practical terms, the result was more dangerous. As AFMC withdrew support from the AAF, the junta became more willing to accept deeper Eastern Bloc involvement. In exchange for infrastructure access, radar sites and military facilities, the regime could obtain the heavy weapons it needed to rebuild.

This placed APLA in a bitter position. The Eastern Bloc, which had once helped sustain the revolutionary movement through MEC-linked channels, now treated the AAF as the more useful client. The regime controlled ports, airfields, administrative structures and strategic terrain. It could accept radar stations, air-defence systems and heavy equipment in a way APLA never could. By 1980, APLA was effectively cut off from large-scale Eastern Bloc supply and received only smaller MEC deliveries.

The AAF used this changing balance to prepare a more cautious offensive in the south. It no longer tried to solve the war through rapid armoured movement alone. The army had learned from the defeats of 1975–1977 and from the fighting around Agios Dionysios. Its method in 1980 was slower, more deliberate and more dependent on artillery, controlled advances, fortified lines and the gradual reduction of APLA-held terrain.

The Death of Kostas Vakardis

On 13 August 1980, Kostas Vakardis was killed by a car bomb in Athira. His driver and bodyguard died with him. Several civilian passersby were wounded. The explosion took place in a city already tense with rumours, investigations and fear of a coming confrontation between the 5th Brigade and the AAF.

The immediate suspicion fell on APLA. The movement had every reason to hate Vakardis. He had been one of the most important organisers of anti-communist violence on Altis, a patron of the 5th Brigade and a central figure in the networks that armed and supplied the regime's irregular forces. Yet APLA did not claim responsibility. In the political culture of the war, silence did not prove innocence, but it left space for other interpretations.

Funeral procession for Kostas Vakardis, Athira, 1980.

Within the FIA and among the men of the 5th Brigade, suspicion also turned toward the junta itself. Vakardis had become too powerful, too wealthy and too independent. His network linked AFMC contacts, private property, ports, factories, arms trading and National Guard manpower. To the General Staff, his death created an opportunity to reclaim control. To his followers, the same opportunity looked like motive.

The truth remained uncertain. The importance of the assassination lay less in the identity of the bomber than in the effect of the explosion. Kostas Vakardis had held together a system based on personal authority, old contacts and the reputation of ruthless effectiveness. His death removed the mediator between the junta and the FIA. What remained was a younger commander, an armed brigade and an inheritance too valuable to surrender.

Nikandros

Nikandros Vakardis inherited more than a family name. He inherited a political movement, a military formation and an economic network. As commander of the 5th Brigade, he already possessed formal authority over the force most closely identified with FIA power. After his father's death, he also became the central figure through whom the Vakardis properties, AFMC contacts, arms channels and nationalist networks were expected to survive.

The inheritance was not secure. The Vakardis family's influence depended on control of Athira, the loyalty of the 5th Brigade, access to Agia Triada and the ability to maintain private supply routes. It also depended on property beyond Athira itself, including industrial assets near Kalohori and other holdings connected to wartime procurement. If the AAF could separate the brigade from its base, inspect its stores, control its roads and seize its external assets, Nikandros would inherit little more than a name.

He therefore interpreted the crisis as a struggle for survival. The junta saw the 5th Brigade as a military unit that had to obey orders. Nikandros saw it as the armed core of his father's legacy. This difference made compromise difficult. A normal commander could be rotated. A private power network could not be moved without being destroyed.

Nikandros also inherited his father's enemies. APLA regarded him as the continuation of the same anti-communist terror apparatus. The ARF distrusted the FIA because of its record of violence, especially against refugees and suspected left-wing sympathisers. The AAF, meanwhile, feared that the young Vakardis would turn grief into defiance. In the weeks after 13 August, all sides understood that the question was no longer whether Athira was loyal. The question was whether it still belonged to the state.

The Relocation Order

The AAF moved through formal channels. A relocation order was prepared for the 5th Brigade. The official reason was military necessity. The brigade was to be transferred to Stavros, where it would relieve regular army units. Those units could then be used to reinforce the AAF grouping around Agios Dionysios, from which the army was conducting operations against APLA.

On paper, the order was rational. The regime needed manpower. The southern front required pressure. Stavros had to be held without tying down regular army formations that could be used elsewhere. The 5th Brigade, as a National Guard formation, could be presented as a suitable force for rear-area security and local defence.

The political meaning was different. Moving the 5th Brigade to Stavros would remove it from Athira, cut it off from the Vakardis base and weaken Nikandros at the moment of succession. It would open the way for inspections, arrests, seizures of property and the dismantling of the arms market. The order was therefore seen in Athira not as a redeployment, but as an attempt to break the FIA before it could consolidate.

Rumours of the order reached Nikandros before the official delegation arrived. When several high-ranking officers sent by the junta approached Athira, they were not admitted into the city. Their car was stopped at the entrance and turned around. The gesture was simple, but its meaning was unmistakable. The officers of the state had been refused entry by a unit that was still, formally, part of the state's own security system.

The mutiny began without a proclamation. It began with a roadblock.

5th Brigade fighters on the streets of Athira, August 1980.

Mutiny

FIA fighters on a captured AAF armored personnel carrier near Athira, 1980.

The first phase of the mutiny was almost bloodless. National Guardsmen loyal to the 5th Brigade disarmed army posts around Athira. Inside the city itself, there was little army structure to remove. Athira had long been a 5th Brigade town, with its base, stores, guards and political networks embedded in daily life. By the time the AAF understood the full extent of the refusal, most of the immediate military facts had already been decided.

The 5th Brigade ceased to function as a normal National Guard formation. It became the armed core of the FIA. The distinction mattered. Other National Guard brigades remained loyal to the regime, and the National Guard as an institution continued to exist. The break was specific, but its consequences were broad. A unit created to defend the junta had become an independent anti-communist force outside junta control.

The AAF responded with force, but not with a full assault. Super Sabre aircraft struck the 5th Brigade barracks. The attack was intended to punish the mutineers, disrupt their command structure and demonstrate that the regime would not tolerate open defiance. The strike caused damage and casualties, but it did not restore control. After the bombing, the army blocked the approaches to Athira. From late August, the city was effectively under blockade.

The regime did not immediately attempt to storm Athira. A direct assault would have required forces the AAF needed elsewhere and would have risked a costly battle inside a hostile urban area. It also threatened to push more anti-communist militants away from the regime. The junta therefore chose containment. It would isolate Athira, seize external assets and wait for the FIA's position to weaken.

For Nikandros, the blockade confirmed what he had already believed. The state was no longer trying to command the 5th Brigade. It was trying to destroy the Vakardis system.

The Ports and Factories

The struggle soon moved beyond Athira itself. The most important external point was Agia Triada, the port associated with the Vakardis network and located only a few kilometres from the city. Control of the port meant access to fuel, weapons, commercial cargo and contact with foreign intermediaries. Without it, Athira could still resist, but its economic reach would be reduced.

In the first days of September, army units clashed with FIA forces at Agia Triada. The fighting was limited but significant. The FIA could not hold the port against the government force and withdrew back toward Athira. Both sides suffered moderate losses. The AAF did not destroy the FIA, but it cut away one of the most important arteries of the Vakardis system.

The army also moved against Vakardis property on the eastern side of Altis. Factories near Kalohori, linked to the family's economic network, were taken under government control. These sites were not defended by regular troops, but by lightly armed guards and local security personnel. Some chose to fight and were killed. Others surrendered. A number fled west toward Athira, carrying news that the regime was not merely blockading the city but dismantling the family's assets across the island.

The seizure of the factories had practical and symbolic value. Practically, it deprived the FIA of property, storage, workshops and revenue. Symbolically, it showed that the junta intended to reduce the Vakardis inheritance piece by piece. The AAF could not yet take Athira, but it could take the port, factories and roads around it. The mutiny had begun as a refusal to redeploy. It had become a contest over the entire material base of the FIA.

AFMC and the Eastern Turn

The break with the 5th Brigade changed the foreign position of the junta. AFMC had already become alarmed by the regime's deepening relationship with the Eastern Bloc. Rumours of Soviet-controlled air-defence infrastructure on Stratis, the growing presence of Eastern weapons in the AAF and the prospect of radar and long-range early warning facilities all made the junta appear less reliable as a Western client. The crisis of 1980 accelerated the shift.

AAF soldiers moving from Kavala toward Agios Dionysios, 1980.

After the mutiny, AFMC support for the AAF effectively ended. The old Vakardis channel no longer served the regime. Instead, it became part of the FIA's inheritance. AFMC did not need to embrace the FIA publicly to recognise its usefulness. The FIA was anti-communist, nationalist and connected to the same networks that had previously supplied the regime. It also opposed both APLA and the increasingly Eastern-dependent AAF.

For the junta, the loss of AFMC aid pushed it further toward the Eastern Bloc. The regime accepted larger infrastructure projects with clear military value: radar sites, long-range detection systems, port improvements and technical facilities. In exchange, the AAF began receiving heavier military equipment, including tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, armoured personnel carriers and artillery. The relationship was no longer limited to light weapons, supplies and ammunition. It was becoming a strategic dependency.

APLA suffered most from this shift. The movement gained no practical benefit from the conflict between the AAF and FIA. Instead, it was cut off completely from large Eastern Bloc deliveries. MEC continued to supply what it could, but in smaller quantities and under greater strain. The revolutionary movement could denounce the junta and the FIA as rival fascists, but the material reality was harsher: one of its enemies had gained access to heavier weapons, and the other had inherited Western-linked channels.

The foreign war around Altis had therefore changed shape. AFMC no longer saw the AAF as the main anti-communist instrument. The Eastern Bloc no longer saw APLA as its primary Altian client. External powers were not abandoning the island. They were choosing new partners.

AAF BMP-1 near Alikampos, 1981.

ARF fighters on Mount Magos, 1980.

The Southern Offensive

The AAF continued its campaign against APLA during the internal crisis. Its offensive was large, but cautious and slow. One axis advanced from Agios Dionysios toward Alikampos. Another moved from the Xirolimni dam toward Zaros. The purpose was to reduce APLA's southern territory, break its defensive depth and threaten the positions that had allowed the movement to recover after 1977.

The method reflected the lessons of earlier campaigns. The AAF avoided reckless thrusts into terrain prepared by the insurgents. It used artillery, gradual movement, local superiority and pressure on multiple points. The army's new supplies and improving logistics helped sustain this approach. APLA remained dangerous, especially in broken ground, but it no longer had the same flow of air-defence weapons and artillery ammunition that had once made government advances so costly.

APLA lost Mount Tafos. The loss weakened its position around Panochori and exposed the wider system of heights that had protected its western approaches. The garrison on Mount Agios Panagiotis came under pressure from three sides. It was not immediately destroyed, but its position became increasingly precarious.

In October, APLA lost Alikampos. In November, under threat of encirclement, its forces abandoned Neochori without battle. The withdrawal was a serious psychological blow. Neochori had been part of the movement's recovery after earlier setbacks, and leaving it without a fight showed that APLA's command understood the danger of being trapped. The movement was not defeated, but its freedom of manoeuvre had narrowed.

The southern campaign marked the beginning of a new phase. APLA could still resist, raid and hold difficult ground, but the balance was shifting. Its enemies were changing faster than it was. The AAF was receiving heavier weapons and adapting its tactics. The FIA had opened a new anti-communist front. The ARF remained hostile and opportunistic. APLA's last window had begun to close.

Magos

The ARF entered 1980 with more limited ambitions than in the great campaign years. Its priority was to hold its existing lines and improve its position where the opportunity justified the cost. The most important objective was Mount Magos. The height dominated the region around Negades and had long shaped the positional struggle between the ARF and AAF.

The campaign for Magos was difficult and costly. The ARF concentrated its forces and accepted losses that it usually tried to avoid. The reason was strategic. Control of Magos would secure Negades, improve the ARF's defensive system and compensate for the earlier abandonment of Mount Amani. It would also reduce the AAF's ability to threaten the ARF's central positions from the south.

In September 1980, the ARF captured Mount Magos. Negades also came under ARF control. The victory did not have the dramatic effect of the 1977 offensive, but it mattered. It showed that the ARF had not become passive. Even while avoiding overextension, it could still identify a key position, concentrate force and absorb losses to take it.

The AAF had considered an operation against ARF-held Galati through Koroni, but the plan became untenable. The road to Koroni was blocked by ARF anti-tank weapons. More importantly, the rear of Koroni had become unsafe after the mutiny in Athira. Athira lay only a short distance west of Koroni, and the emergence of the FIA made any operation in that area more complicated. The army could not risk advancing with a hostile force in its rear while also fighting APLA in the south.

The mutiny of the 5th Brigade therefore affected the front even where FIA forces did not attack. It changed the geography of risk. Places that had been rear areas became uncertain. Roads that had been usable became exposed. The AAF's war plans had to account for a new enemy born inside its own security structure.

The War Becomes Four-Sided

By the end of 1980, the civil war had changed again. In 1977, the anti-junta front had broken apart. In 1980, the regime's own war system did the same. The 5th Brigade mutiny did not destroy the National Guard, nor did it bring down the junta. But it created a new major armed actor and forced every faction to reconsider the map.

The AAF remained the army of the state. It controlled the capital, major institutions, much of the island's formal infrastructure and the loyal structures of the National Guard. It was also becoming more dependent on the Eastern Bloc for heavy weapons, air defence, radar infrastructure and long-term military support. Its strength was growing in material terms, but its political position was more compromised than before.

The ARF held a large northern and central zone, including Syrta, Frini, Oreokastro, Mount Magos and Negades. It remained cautious, non-communist and hostile to the junta, but it refused to embrace the FIA as an ally. Some within the ARF argued that the new anti-junta, anti-communist force could be useful. The idea was quickly rejected. The FIA's reputation, especially its connection to National Guard violence and to Orino, made formal cooperation impossible. The ARF chose only to avoid confrontation where possible.

APLA remained a revolutionary force, but its position had deteriorated. It had lost ground in the south, suffered from reduced supply and faced enemies on several sides. It publicly celebrated the conflict between the AAF and FIA, but gained no strategic advantage from it. The shift of Eastern Bloc support toward the junta left APLA more dependent on MEC and on the shadow economy than ever before.

The FIA emerged from the 5th Brigade as the fourth major force. It held Athira under blockade, had lost Agia Triada and some eastern assets, but retained armed strength, nationalist legitimacy among its supporters and access to AFMC-linked channels. It was anti-communist, anti-APLA and hostile to the AAF leadership in Pyrgos. It had been born from the regime's own dirty war and from the economy that sustained it.

Altis was no longer divided between government and insurgency, or even between the junta and two rival resistance movements. By the close of 1980, the war had become four-sided. Each faction possessed territory, weapons, external contacts and reasons to distrust all the others. The conflict had not become more chaotic because the factions were weak. It had become more complex because each of them had become strong enough to survive.

FIA fighters in Athira, 1980.

The New Strength of the AAF

By the beginning of 1981, the AAF had changed more than any of its enemies expected. The army that had entered the civil war in 1975 as a conventional force dependent on roads, armour and air power had been damaged, embarrassed and forced to learn. Its early counterattacks had failed in the mountains around Oreokastro. Its southern campaigns had been slowed by mines, terrain and APLA air-defence weapons. Its authority had been challenged not only by insurgents, but by the mutiny of the 5th Brigade. Yet the regime had survived each crisis and drawn lessons from them.

The AAF's strength now came from accumulation. It still possessed large quantities of older Western equipment acquired before and during the first years of the war. After the break with AFMC, it also received increasing amounts of Eastern Bloc heavy weaponry: tanks, armoured personnel carriers, infantry fighting vehicles and artillery. This created an army with an uneven but large arsenal, combining old Western systems with newer Eastern deliveries. The result was not elegant, but it was powerful.

The greater change was tactical. The AAF no longer expected rapid thrusts to settle the war. It had learned to reduce insurgent positions by isolating them, cutting roads, taking heights and using artillery before committing infantry and armour. Mountain units, loyal National Guard formations, local informants and a growing network of fortified posts gave the regime more tools than it had possessed in the first years of the conflict. The army was still brutal and often wasteful, but it was no longer inexperienced.

The regime's priorities in 1981 were clear. In the south, APLA had to be destroyed as a territorial force. In the north-west, the problem of the FIA had to be contained before it became another permanent front. Against the ARF, the AAF could not yet mount a final campaign, but it could prevent the republicans from exploiting the other struggles. The war was no longer about one decisive battle. It was about removing the insurgents' open geography piece by piece.

AAF raider in the mountains near Tafos, southern Altis, 1981.

Athira

Athira had been under blockade since the end of August 1980. The city remained the symbolic centre of the FIA, but its practical value had declined. The port of Agia Triada had been lost. Vakardis assets on the eastern side of the island had been seized. Fuel, spare parts and ammunition became harder to move. The city still sheltered armed men, political loyalists and the remains of the Vakardis network, but it no longer offered the same access to the outside world.

FIA commanders understood the danger. A static defence of Athira would allow the AAF to concentrate artillery, armour and aircraft against a fixed target. The mutiny of 1980 had succeeded because it transformed a National Guard brigade into a political force. Holding Athira at any cost would risk turning that force into a trapped garrison. Nikandros Vakardis therefore began preparing for evacuation before the final crisis arrived.

The evacuation was not a single movement. Weapons, documents, radio equipment, money and selected personnel were moved gradually into forests, safe houses and hidden stores. Some of these locations had been prepared through old FIA and Vakardis contacts; others were improvised by supporters who understood that the movement could not survive if everything remained inside the city. The aim was to preserve the organisation even if Athira fell.

Small firefights took place outside the city during the early months of 1981. Patrols clashed near roads and farms, and both sides tested the blockade line. The FIA did not attempt to break the encirclement in strength. The AAF, for its part, avoided a premature assault while it assembled the forces needed for a mechanised attack. The regime wanted the city back, but it also wanted to avoid spending regular army units in an urban battle while the southern campaign was still under way.

When the AAF began preparing a mechanised strike group for the final operation, the FIA made its decision. The main body did not remain to fight for Athira street by street. It withdrew before the assault could begin, leaving behind limited covering groups, loyalists, abandoned stores and a city that had already been emptied of much of the movement's mobile strength. When the AAF entered Athira, it recovered an important town and a symbol of state authority. It did not destroy the FIA.

The Road to Frini

The FIA's withdrawal did not move directly into a single new base. Its men and supplies dispersed through the north-western countryside, into forest camps, concealed warehouses, sympathetic homes and temporary holding points. This dispersal allowed the organisation to survive the fall of Athira without presenting the AAF with a single target. It also concealed the direction of the movement's next major action.

That action was Frini. The town had been under ARF control since the defection of its garrison in November 1975. For years, it had remained one of the symbols of the republican presence in the north-west. The ARF forces there were not large. The town and the nearby military outpost had never faced a major assault, and the republicans treated the area as part of their rear system rather than as a front line.

For the FIA, Frini offered what Athira no longer could: access to forests, mountains and small coastal points. Nychi, east of the town, provided a possible route to the sea and to the kind of clandestine logistics that had sustained the ARF in earlier years. The north-western terrain also suited the FIA's new situation. A movement that could no longer hold an exposed urban base could survive as a mobile, well-armed guerrilla force.

The attack came before the ARF could adjust to the speed of the FIA withdrawal from Athira. Former National Guardsmen, now fighting as FIA units, moved against Frini and its local outpost with more strength and coordination than the ARF garrison expected. The town fell quickly. Some ARF fighters withdrew into the mountains; others were captured. Local ARF supporters who could not leave went underground.

The symbolism was sharp. The force that had once failed to retake Frini for the regime now took it for itself. The FIA did not restore junta authority there. It replaced ARF control with its own. From that moment, the north-west was no longer the natural rear of the republican movement. It became contested ground.

FIA fighter in Frini, 1981.

The Northern Rivalry

The arrival of the FIA in Frini changed the northern war. The ARF had spent years fighting the AAF from mountains, forests and difficult roads that favoured insurgent methods. The FIA entered the same landscape with similar skills, but a different political character. Its fighters were better armed than most irregulars, trained by years of National Guard service and accustomed to harsh internal security methods. They knew how insurgents moved because many of them had once hunted insurgents.

The ARF now faced a rival inside the geography that had made it strong. Frini, Nychi and the surrounding routes threatened republican supply lines and local authority. ARF commanders had to divert attention away from Magos, Negades and the southern approaches in order to contain the new enemy. Every patrol sent against the FIA was a patrol not available against the AAF. Every local contact had to be reassessed for loyalty or fear.

The conflict between the ARF and FIA did not immediately become a large front. It took the form of raids, ambushes, arrests, disappearances and competition for stores, guides and port access. Villages that had lived under ARF influence for years now faced pressure from a second anti-junta force whose reputation was far darker. Some communities tried to remain neutral. Others gave information to whichever armed group was closest.

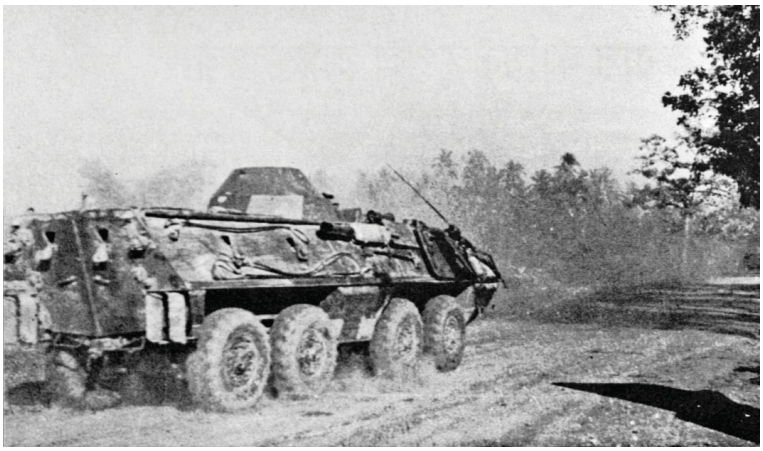
For the AAF, the northern rivalry was useful even when it could not be controlled. The regime still regarded the FIA as an enemy, but the presence of a hostile force in the ARF's rear weakened the republicans. The FIA's move to Frini did not restore government authority in the north-west. It made republican authority less secure.

Zaros

While the north-west fractured, the AAF opened its main campaign in the south. Zaros was the central target. The town had been one of APLA's most important successes in 1975 and had served as a political and logistical centre for the movement's southern war. Its loss would mean more than the capture of another settlement. It would mark the collapse of the territorial system APLA had built over six years.

By early 1981, APLA's position around Zaros was vulnerable. The movement had already lost Alikampos and Neochori in 1980, while Mount Tafos had fallen and the garrison on Agios Panagiotis was threatened from several sides. Supplies were limited, artillery ammunition was harder to obtain and the older flow of anti-aircraft weapons had not returned. MEC could still help, but it could not recreate the support once provided through broader Eastern Bloc channels.

The AAF advanced carefully. It used the Xirolimni direction, pressure from previously recovered positions and artillery support to isolate the town before committing to the final stages of the operation. The army avoided the kind of rapid thrust that had failed in earlier years. It concentrated on making the defence of Zaros progressively less useful to APLA. Roads were cut, observation points taken and escape routes narrowed.



AAF armored personnel carrier moving toward Zaros, 1981.

Zaros fell in the early part of 1981. The fall did not annihilate APLA's fighters. Many withdrew before the final collapse, and others dissolved into smaller groups. But the loss destroyed APLA's southern centre. The movement no longer possessed the same ability to organise a front, receive supplies through nearby routes or claim to govern a revolutionary zone.

For the AAF, the capture of Zaros was the greatest southern success since the beginning of the war. It gave the army a base from which to turn the geography of the south against APLA. The next operations would not be isolated attacks. They would be coordinated reductions of a collapsing system.

The Pincer Operations

During the summer of 1981, the AAF used Zaros and Alikampos to organise a series of operations against the remaining APLA positions. The army advanced on Poliakko from the directions of Zaros and Alikampos, while another effort moved toward Edessa from Zaros and Panochori. These attacks were designed to place APLA units in pincers rather than drive them back along a single line.

The method showed how much the AAF had improved. Instead of striking at one town or height in isolation, it used converging movement to make adjacent positions untenable. APLA units that stayed too long risked being surrounded. Units that withdrew too early exposed neighbouring sectors. The southern front began to lose coherence not because every position was stormed, but because each position depended on routes and heights that were falling elsewhere.

Poliakko and Edessa became part of this wider collapse. APLA fought in places and withdrew in others, but it could no longer restore the old connection between its southern districts. The army's artillery and armour were used with more restraint than in earlier campaigns, but also with greater effect. Government commanders increasingly preferred to force withdrawals rather than produce costly urban battles.

The remnants of APLA's regular forces faced a difficult choice. To defend every remaining position was to invite encirclement. To retreat was to abandon the territorial project that had defined the movement since 1975. By late summer, the choice had largely been made by circumstance. The revolutionary army could survive only by ceasing to behave like an army.

The loss of the south did not produce a single dramatic surrender. It was a sequence of evacuations, broken local commands, abandoned stores and small groups moving into hills, villages and urban networks. APLA had not been destroyed, but its front had been.

APLA Underground

The AAF victory in the south was territorial, not final. APLA no longer held Zaros, Neochori, Alikampos or the old network of heights as an open military system. It no longer possessed a continuous front or a stable rear. Yet its cadres, political cells, sympathisers and hidden stores remained. The movement had been forced back into the form from which it had originally emerged: clandestine organisation, small armed groups and selective violence.

The first signs came quickly. Mines appeared on roads that AAF engineers had already declared cleared. Supply trucks were attacked on approaches to former APLA zones. Informants disappeared. Small patrols received brief bursts of fire from hillsides and orchards before the attackers withdrew. In several cases, the AAF found abandoned positions empty, only to suffer casualties days later on the road used to supply them.

These actions did not threaten to recapture territory. That was their importance. APLA was no longer trying to hold the south in the old way. It was making the south expensive to govern. The movement's remaining commanders understood that open defence would only invite destruction. Mines, ambushes, sabotage and underground cells offered a way to survive under government control.

The AAF responded with arrests, road controls and punitive sweeps. Some were effective. Others pushed civilians back toward silence or sympathy with the underground. The regime could occupy towns and establish posts, but it could not easily distinguish between a defeated population and a waiting network. In 1981, the AAF defeated APLA as a regular force and forced it back into guerrilla war.

This was a major victory for the regime. It was not peace.

AAF APC damaged in an APLA ambush, 1982.

The Year’s Balance

By the end of 1981, the map of the war had changed again. The AAF had recovered Athira and broken APLA’s southern territorial system. Its confidence grew with every captured town and reopened road. The army now possessed greater material strength than at any earlier point in the conflict and had learned to apply that strength more patiently. The regime could claim, with some justification, that it had begun the reconquest of Altis.

The FIA had lost Athira, Agia Triada and part of the Vakardis economic base, but it had survived the loss of its city. By dispersing men and supplies before the final government operation, it preserved the core of the organisation. The seizure of Frini gave it a new base and a new form of war. It was no longer a mutinous National Guard brigade defending a town. It was becoming a northern guerrilla force.

The ARF suffered no single catastrophic defeat in 1981, but its position worsened. The appearance of the FIA in Frini forced the republicans to defend their own rear and contest routes they had once considered secure. The ARF still held Oreokastro, Syrta, Mount Magos and Negades, but the geography of its war had become more complicated. It now faced the AAF from one direction and the FIA from another.

APLA suffered the greatest transformation. It had entered the year as a damaged but still territorial movement. It ended the year as an underground insurgency. Its fighters remained, its ideology remained and its MEC links remained, but the southern front had collapsed. The movement could still kill, sabotage and survive. It could no longer govern.

The meaning of 1981 was therefore not the end of the insurgencies. It was the end of one form of insurgency. The AAF had begun to win the visible war: towns, roads, outposts and fronts. Beneath that victory, the armed movements adapted. Each lost territory in a different way. Each found a way to continue.

2nd National Guard Brigade forces in Zaros, 1981.

After the South

The defeat of APLA as a regular force changed the shape of the war on Altis. By the beginning of 1982, the AAF no longer faced a continuous revolutionary front in the south. Zaros had fallen, the old APLA positions around Poliakko and Edessa had been broken, and the movement's remaining forces had been driven back into mines, small cells, hidden caches and short attacks against roads and convoys. APLA still existed, but it no longer held a territorial system that could absorb an army campaign.

This did not make the south safe. Mines continued to appear on roads that engineers had already cleared. AAF trucks were ambushed on approaches to former APLA districts. Informants disappeared from villages where the regime had recently restored its authority. Patrols that moved too far from their posts could still receive fire from hillsides, orchards or abandoned farm buildings. The government controlled the towns, but control required men, fuel, vehicles and constant attention.

The difference was that APLA could no longer stop the AAF from turning north. The regime could now concentrate more resources against the ARF, the last insurgent movement still holding a large open territory. The republican zone remained more complex than the south. It included old strongholds, mountain roads, forest routes, ports, former army defectors and communities that had lived under ARF authority for years. Oreokastro was still the political centre of the movement, but the northern system depended on more than one town. Galati, Pyrsos, Syrta, Abdera, the northern airfield, Agios Konstantinos, Aristi, Faros and the ridges around Synneforos all formed part of the geography that allowed the ARF to remain a territorial force.

The AAF had learned enough not to treat this geography as one target. It would not destroy the ARF by one thrust toward Oreokastro. It would have to take roads, heights, observation points, airfields and settlements in sequence. The northern campaign of 1982–1983 was therefore not a single offensive. It was a long process of making each republican position depend on another position that could be attacked separately.

Frini and the Grey Arrangement

The ARF's northern problem was made worse by the survival of the FIA. After losing Athira in 1981, the FIA had not been destroyed. Its men, documents, weapons and money had been dispersed into forests, safe houses and hidden stores before the city fell. Its main armed strength moved to the north-west and seized Frini, replacing ARF control with its own. Nychi remained in FIA hands and was not seriously contested. For the FIA, this gave access to the coast, forest routes and a new political landscape in which it could survive without holding an exposed urban centre.

FIA militant in northwestern Altis, 1982.

The AAF did not recognise the FIA as an ally. The movement had mutinied against the regime, inherited the Vakardis network and continued to present itself as an anti-junta force. Yet the government did not immediately try to destroy it in Frini and Nychi. The reason was practical. The FIA's presence in the north-west placed pressure on the ARF from a direction the republicans had once considered part of their rear. As long as the FIA fought the ARF, it served a function the AAF could exploit.

This produced a grey arrangement rather than an alliance. FIA commanders tried to preserve clandestine channels with government officers, local intermediaries and former security contacts. They avoided actions that would force the AAF to concentrate against them, but they could not avoid all clashes. Patrols met on the edges of influence zones, local commanders misread signals, and small firefights occurred where neither side wanted to appear weak. The FIA remained an enemy of the regime, but it also tried to make itself useful enough to survive.

For the ARF, this was a dangerous development. The FIA was not a conventional army that could be waited for on the roads. It was a hard, mobile force built from former National Guardsmen, local contacts and anti-communist networks. Its men understood arrests, informants, ambushes and small-unit movement because many of them had once used those methods for the state. The ARF now faced an opponent that could fight in the same forests and mountains, but with a more ruthless political culture.

Krya Nera

The danger became clear at Krya Nera in 1982. The settlement and port lay far enough from Frini to show ambition and close enough to Abdera to alarm the ARF. If the FIA could establish itself there, it would threaten the rear of the central northern republican territories and force the ARF to defend routes that had already been strained by the AAF's pressure from the south and east.

The battle lasted five days. Around a hundred fighters on each side took part, making it too small to decide the war but large enough to reveal the new balance in the north-west. FIA units approached Krya Nera and tried to force the ARF into a local collapse before republican reserves could arrive. They did not enter the settlement, but they came close enough to make the threat unmistakable.

Both sides used mortars. The FIA achieved the better results. Its mortar teams fired from positions the ARF failed to locate, shifting before counterfire could find them. Republican commanders later admitted that they had been unable to determine whether the fire came from one concealed position, several dispersed crews or a mobile section moving between prearranged points. The effect was the same: ARF fighters near Krya Nera were forced to fight under intermittent and accurate bombardment while trying to identify an enemy they could not see.

The ARF won only after committing mechanised reserves. Several armoured vehicles and a tank were brought forward, giving the republicans enough firepower to stop the FIA advance and threaten its withdrawal routes. The FIA did not have the means to hold under that pressure. It pulled back before being fixed in place.

Krya Nera remained in ARF hands. Tactically, the republicans had won. Strategically, the battle was more troubling. The FIA had shown that Frini was no longer a distant problem. It could reach toward the approaches of Abdera, use mortars effectively and force the ARF to commit scarce reserves away from the main AAF front. Even victory had cost the republicans time, fuel and attention.

ARF mortar crew during the battle for Krya Nera, 1982.

Magos

The AAF's next major operation was directed against Mount Magos and the Negades area. Magos had been one of the ARF's most important gains of 1980, a height that strengthened the republican position in the south-western part of the northern war. Its loss would not immediately expose Syrta, but it would weaken the ARF's control of the western approaches and place Agios Konstantinos under growing pressure.

The army treated Magos more seriously than the later operation against Kira. The height was not merely an observation point. It was a developed ARF position, defended by men who understood both its tactical value and its symbolic importance. A rushed assault would have been costly and uncertain. The AAF therefore prepared the attack with artillery, air strikes and reconnaissance probes before committing its main force.

For several days, government artillery struck known and suspected ARF positions on the height. Aircraft attacked trenches, firing points and supply paths whenever weather and visibility allowed. The bombardment did not destroy the defence, but it forced the republicans to move, reveal routes and abandon some of their prepared positions. AAF patrols and raider groups then tested the edges of the position, drawing fire and marking targets for further strikes.

The decisive phase included a helicopter landing. It was the first major use of this method in the northern campaign and showed how the AAF intended to fight the remaining mountain war. Rather than climb every approach from below, the army used helicopters to place assault elements where the ARF did not expect a conventional attack. The landing was supported by artillery and aircraft, but it still carried considerable risk. The terrain, machine-gun fire and limited landing zones made the operation difficult.

Magos fell after heavy fighting. The ARF withdrew from the height and from positions that could no longer be held once the summit was lost. Negades and the surrounding area became increasingly exposed, and the defensive relationship between Magos, Agios Konstantinos and the western approaches began to break apart. The AAF had not yet taken Agios Konstantinos, but it had removed one of the positions that helped protect it.

The fall of Magos also affected ARF decision-making elsewhere. Republican commanders understood that Kira now mattered more, but they did not have enough time to turn it into a strong position. The AAF saw the same opportunity. Magos had required preparation, bombardment and a carefully supported landing. Kira would be attacked faster, before the ARF could make it another fortress.

AAF helicopter firing on Mount Magos, 1982.

Mount Kira

The fall of Magos immediately changed the value of Mount Kira. The height dominated Agios Konstantinos and had served as a forward ARF observation position, but it had not yet been prepared to the same standard as Magos. Republican commanders understood the danger, yet the speed of the AAF's movement after Magos left them little time to reinforce the height properly.

Kira was dangerous because it had not yet become a fortress. Its value as an observation point was clear. Its defences were not yet mature. The AAF decided to exploit that interval. The army wanted the height before the ARF could strengthen it and before Agios Konstantinos could be reorganised around a more secure defensive system.

AAF raiders were used for the landing. Artillery and aircraft struck known and suspected positions around the height, but the preparation was shorter than at Magos. Helicopters then carried the raiders into the area. ARF heavy machine-gun fire hit the landing force hard. Two helicopters were shot down before the height was secured. The losses were serious, and they reminded the AAF that helicopter mobility did not remove the risks of mountain war.

The landing succeeded despite those losses. The raiders took Kira and forced the ARF observers off the height. Agios Konstantinos did not fall with Kira, but the town became visible, measurable and vulnerable. AAF artillery could now be corrected more effectively, movement around the town could be watched, and the ARF's local defensive system had lost one of its most important eyes.

Mount Kira was a tactical operation with institutional consequences. It showed that the AAF could use raiders, helicopters, artillery and air support to remove key positions before launching larger clearing operations. It also showed that the force which would later enter towns needed to be more than loyal and brutal. It needed to work with army fire support.

The National Guard Reformed

The National Guard had always been politically important to the regime. Its loyal brigades, police forces and territorial structures provided the junta with men who could hold checkpoints, conduct searches, suppress opposition and enforce authority in places where regular army units were needed elsewhere. After the mutiny of the 5th Brigade, loyalty became even more important. The remaining National Guard formations were watched closely, rewarded selectively and tied more firmly to the survival of the state.

In 1982 and 1983, selected National Guard units were reorganised for a new role. They were no longer treated only as local security formations. They became the regime's preferred clearing force for towns, villages and recently recovered districts. Regular army units could take heights and break fronts. The reorganised National Guard was meant to enter, search, hold and pacify.

This required more than discipline. Army artillery observers, air-support specialists, communications personnel and other technical officers were attached to selected National Guard formations. The aim was to make these units able to operate under an army fire-support system rather than simply follow behind it. If a town had to be cleared under artillery cover, if a suspected ARF position had to be marked for aircraft, or if a convoy had to move through contested ground, the National Guard needed direct access to the specialists who could coordinate that support.

National Guard troops at an outpost in northwestern Altis, 1982.

Equipment also changed. Priority National Guard units received better individual protection, newer radios and more modern small arms. Much of this equipment was Western in pattern, reflecting older supply channels and the special status of these units inside the regime's security structure. The regular army continued to operate with a mixed inventory of Western and Eastern weapons, but selected National Guard forces were increasingly presented as disciplined, well-equipped and politically reliable.

The transformation did not make the National Guard less harsh. It made it more useful. The same formations that searched houses, arrested suspects and ran checkpoints could now move with armoured support, call for fire and coordinate with aircraft. For the ARF, this meant that the return of government authority to a town no longer ended with the arrival of regular troops. It continued with a more systematic occupation.

Galati

The campaign against Galati began in late 1982. The town had been part of the ARF's central northern system since the republican offensive of 1977. Its position, roads and relationship to Pyrsos made it too important for either side to treat as symbolic ground. If the AAF wanted to break the centre of ARF territory, Galati had to be taken.

The ARF fought desperately for the town. Unlike some positions that could be abandoned once surrounding heights were lost, Galati was defended as a major obstacle. Its approaches were difficult for armour, and the republicans used the surrounding ground to prepare anti-tank nests and concealed firing points. These positions were hard to detect before they opened fire. In many cases, the first sign of an ARF nest was a damaged or burning vehicle.

AAF tank destroyed on the approaches to Galati, 1982.

The AAF paid for the advance. Up to ten tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and armoured personnel carriers were lost or disabled during the operation. The losses came not from one dramatic engagement, but from repeated encounters with hidden anti-armour teams. A vehicle would move forward, receive fire from a position that had not yet been identified, and then the AAF would halt, locate the source and bring in artillery or aircraft. Only after the nest had been destroyed or suppressed could the advance continue.

This method was slow and costly, but it worked. The AAF had enough armour and fire support to absorb losses that would have stopped earlier campaigns. Artillery and aircraft destroyed positions once they revealed themselves. Infantry and armour then moved forward again. Galati was taken by assault, not abandoned. The ARF suffered heavy losses defending it.

The fall of Galati opened the way to Pyrsos. It also showed the character of the new northern war. The AAF was strong enough to keep advancing after losing vehicles, but the ARF could still make each approach expensive. The regime had learned to win these battles. It had not learned how to win them cheaply.

Pyrsos

Pyrsos became the winter battle of the campaign. The height dominated the surrounding area and allowed the ARF to keep roads, approaches and exposed ground under fire control. As long as Pyrsos remained in republican hands, the AAF could not fully exploit the capture of Galati or move confidently against the next objectives.

The army did not begin with a full assault. It sent reconnaissance patrols and raider groups to identify firing points, observation posts, mortar positions and routes used by ARF defenders. These probes were often dangerous and sometimes costly, but they produced the information the AAF needed. Once positions were found, artillery and aircraft were brought in.

The ARF tried to hold through concealment, movement and prepared fallback points. It still knew the ground better than the attackers, and it could still punish careless movement around the height. For several weeks, Pyrsos remained under republican fire control. AAF patrols could approach, but not stay. Engineers could work, but only under cover. Vehicles had to move carefully and often at night.

Gradually, the defence weakened. Artillery strikes collapsed shelters, cut trenches and forced defenders to shift between positions more often. Air attacks destroyed or isolated points that could not be reached quickly from the ground. The ARF could still fight, but its defensive system developed gaps. Positions that had supported each other became separated. Movement between them became more dangerous. Ammunition had to be carried farther under fire.

In late December 1982, the AAF began the real assault. The attack was not sudden; it was the culmination of weeks of reconnaissance, bombardment and pressure. The fighting continued into January 1983. When Pyrsos fell, the central northern defence of the ARF began to lose its structure. The fall of one height did not destroy the republican movement, but it removed the ground that had allowed several other positions to remain connected.

Agios Minas and Syrta

The fall of Pyrsos allowed the AAF to turn against Syrta and Abdera. Syrta had a long political and military history in the war. The shootings of August 1974 had helped radicalise the island. The failed ARF attack in April 1975 had marked the beginning of open conflict. In 1977, the surrender of Syrta's garrison had become one of the symbols of the republican breakthrough. By 1983, the town remained important, but its defence depended on the surrounding heights.

Agios Minas was the decisive position. The height overlooked Syrta and the approaches around it. As long as the ARF held Agios Minas, Syrta could be defended as part of a wider terrain system. Once the height was lost, the town risked becoming a trap.

The AAF advanced against Agios Minas in March 1983. The operation followed the pattern that had developed since 1982: reconnaissance, suppression, artillery, air strikes and ground movement against identified positions. The ARF fought to delay the loss, but it no longer had the reserves to restore the situation once the height began to fall. By late March, Agios Minas was in AAF hands.

The ARF then began an organised withdrawal from Syrta. It was not a panic. Commanders understood that holding the town after the loss of Agios Minas would expose their remaining forces to fire, encirclement and eventual destruction. They chose to preserve men rather than repeat the kind of costly defence that had already bled the movement at Galati and Pyrsos.

The withdrawal did not go cleanly. AAF observers detected movement, and the retreating ARF rear guard was struck before it could fully disengage. Part of the covering force was destroyed. When government troops entered Syrta, they encountered scattered firing points, small ambushes and isolated groups left behind to delay them. The town was not taken in a major street battle, but neither was it simply handed over.

Syrta's fall had a powerful meaning. The ARF had not lost it in one assault. It had lost the ground that made Syrta defensible. The war in the north was being decided by heights before towns, by roads before declarations and by the slow removal of the positions that allowed republican control to function.

ARF forces near Syrta, 1982.

Abdera

Abdera was harder. The town had suffered multiple episodes of fighting and destruction, and by 1983 its damaged streets and limited approaches favoured the defender. The AAF could enter it only along one main paved road. For a mechanised force, this created an obvious problem: movement was predictable, vehicles could be canalised, and every destroyed obstacle or concealed firing point slowed the assault.

The capture of Pyrsos helped the AAF suppress ARF positions around Abdera. From the height, artillery observers and forward elements could identify firing points that had previously been harder to engage. Government fire support struck buildings, roadblocks and suspected strongpoints before the final assault. Still, the town could not be taken by fire alone. Infantry and armour had to enter.

The mechanised assault lasted about a week. AAF units moved along the paved approach under artillery cover, clearing one section after another. ARF defenders used the ruins, side streets and prepared positions to slow the attack. They lacked the strength to stop the army permanently, but they could force it to fight for each stage of the advance. The town's destruction made movement difficult for both sides, but it also gave defenders places to hide, withdraw and reappear.

Abdera eventually fell. The victory was important not only because of the town itself, but because of what lay north of it. The airfield north of Abdera became the next target. Once Abdera was taken, the AAF moved quickly. Within several days, a combined mechanised strike and helicopter landing overwhelmed the remaining ARF defence around the airfield.

The fall of the airfield changed the rhythm of the campaign. It gave the AAF a forward base from which to support operations toward Aristi and Faros. It also deprived the ARF of another element of the central northern system. The republicans had lost Galati, Pyrsos, Agios Minas, Syrta, Abdera and now the airfield. Their territory still existed, but it was no longer continuous in the same way.

Agios Konstantinos

In May 1983, the reorganised National Guard was used against Agios Konstantinos. The earlier capture of Mount Kira had made the town vulnerable. Government forces could observe movement, direct fire and plan the assault with better information than they had possessed before. The ARF position in the town was therefore weakened before the first National Guard units entered.

The assault lasted three to four days. Compared with Galati or Abdera, Agios Konstantinos fell quickly, but it was not abandoned without resistance. National Guard units cleared one ARF firing point after another with a level of professionalism that surprised some army officers. They used attached specialists, communications and fire support more effectively than earlier loyalist formations would have been able to do. The town was taken under a system rather than by simple force of numbers.

Once the town was under government control, the danger changed. ARF fighters who had not been killed or captured shifted to ambushes and small attacks. National Guard patrols took moderate losses after the official capture, especially on roads and in areas where the local terrain allowed small groups to fire and withdraw. As in the south after APLA's defeat, holding the town proved different from taking it.

The population of Agios Konstantinos was exhausted. Years of war, changing fronts, shortages and armed authority had produced apathy rather than enthusiasm. This made government work easier. Some residents cooperated out of fear, others for money, and many simply because they wanted the fighting to move elsewhere. Several locals were bribed into identifying ARF contacts and routes.

This information led the National Guard toward Gori. ARF elements there formed a local node of resistance, connected to fighters, guides and stores in the surrounding area. The National Guard attacked quickly before the network could disperse.

ARF militiamen in Agios Konstantinos, late 1982.

Gori and Fothia

National Guard troops in the mountains northwest of Agios Konstantinos, 1983.

The battle for Gori was short but heavy. Unlike Agios Konstantinos, where government preparation and Mount Kira had already weakened the defence, Gori required a more direct fight against an ARF node that still had enough men and local knowledge to resist. The battle lasted one day. National Guard units, supported by armoured vehicles and army specialists, forced their way through the position and destroyed or scattered the ARF group.

The fall of Gori helped secure the area around Agios Konstantinos, but the work did not end there. The surrounding countryside still contained caches, small groups and families connected to the republican underground. The National Guard began the slower part of the operation: searches, arrests, checkpoints, interrogations and the clearing of roads and houses. This was the kind of war for which the reorganised units had been prepared.

Fothia fell more easily. From the direction of Agios Konstantinos, the approach was comparatively open, and the ARF no longer had the local structure needed to make a prolonged defence. A mechanised strike took the settlement the day after Agios Konstantinos fell. Its capture widened the government-held belt and reduced the ARF's ability to move along the western approaches without entering areas under National Guard pressure.

Through the summer, the Fothia–Agios Konstantinos–Gori area became a clearing zone rather than a battlefield in the older sense. The National Guard established posts, patrolled roads and searched for the remains of ARF organisation. Some operations found weapons and documents. Others found nothing. The process was slow, coercive and uneven, but it brought the regime back into communities that had been outside its effective control for years.

The National Guard's role in this campaign confirmed its new status inside the AAF system. It was no longer merely a loyalist security force. It had become an elite internal instrument of reconquest: politically reliable, better equipped, supported by army specialists and used where occupation required both force and persistence.

Government convoy advancing toward Faros under helicopter cover, 1983.

The Road to Aristi

The regular army's summer campaign developed from the northern Abdera airfield. The road toward Aristi and then Faros became the next line of advance. On a map, the movement appeared simple: a push from the recovered airfield through the interior toward the north-western coast. On the ground, it was slow and costly.

The problem was Synneforos. The ridge dominated the road and gave the ARF observation, cover and firing positions. Government vehicles had to move through terrain where mines, ambushes and indirect fire could slow the column at any point. Engineers cleared stretches of road only to find new obstacles beyond them. Patrols took fire from slopes that had to be searched, shelled or bypassed. Supply vehicles required escorts, and escorts required more fuel, more men and more time.

The AAF advanced because it had to. Roads were the only way to move heavy equipment, ammunition, food and wounded men in the quantities required. Helicopters could help, but they could not replace road control. The ARF fought from the ridge because it could. It no longer had the strength to stop the AAF in open battle, but it could delay movement, inflict losses and make the army pay for every secured section.

Aristi became the first major objective of this slow advance. The army reached it only after repeated clearing operations and pressure against the heights overlooking the road. The ARF withdrew from some positions before they could be destroyed, but left mines, firing points and observation teams behind. The pattern repeated itself beyond Aristi as the AAF pushed toward Faros.

Faros was taken in the autumn of 1983. Its fall marked the end of the long road campaign, but not the destruction of the ARF in the surrounding mountains. Republican fighters withdrew toward Oreokastro, Thronos, Synneforos and the remaining western and north-western routes. The AAF had extended its control, but the terrain still allowed small groups to survive between the formal lines of occupation.

The campaign from Abdera airfield to Faros showed both sides at their late-war limits. The AAF could now sustain a long advance through difficult country, supported by artillery, helicopters, engineers and armour. The ARF could no longer hold every town or road, but it could still force the regime to move slowly and bleed for movement.

The Last Open Territory

By the end of 1983, the northern war had transformed the ARF. The movement still existed as an organised force, and unlike APLA it still held open territory. Oreokastro remained in republican hands. The mountains and forests around it, including routes near Thronos and the Synneforos area, continued to shelter fighters, stores and political structures. ARF authority survived in a reduced but visible form.

Yet the old northern system had been broken. Galati had fallen after a hard assault. Magos and Kira had been taken by helicopter-supported operations. Pyrsos had fallen in winter. Agios Minas had made Syrta impossible to hold. Abdera had been stormed and the northern airfield captured. Agios Konstantinos, Gori and Fothia had been brought under National Guard control. Aristi and Faros had been reached after a long and costly campaign. Krya Nera had remained in ARF hands, but the battle there had shown that the FIA could threaten the republican rear. Frini and Nychi remained outside ARF control and continued to distort the north-western balance.

The AAF had not yet destroyed the ARF. It had narrowed it. The republicans were no longer a northern alternative state stretching across towns, roads, ports and mountains. They were becoming a final territorial enclave around Oreokastro and the western highlands, surrounded by enemies and cut away from many of the positions that had once made their control durable.

The regime also changed during this period. The AAF of 1983 was stronger, heavier and more methodical than the army of 1975. The arrival of the Mi-24 gave it a new kind of helicopter capability: heavily armed, heavily armoured and able to combine firepower with assault functions in a way the early Cobras had not. Raiders, artillery observers, air-support specialists, mechanised columns and reorganised National Guard units now formed parts of a single counterinsurgency system. The system was still brutal, uneven and dependent on foreign support, but it was effective.

For the ARF, the lesson was harsh. The movement had survived the early war because the AAF had been clumsy, overextended and politically isolated in many rural areas. By 1983, the army had learned to take the ground that made republican positions defensible. It did not always take towns first. It took the heights above them, the roads into them and the airfields beyond them. Then the towns followed.

The ARF entered 1984 as the last insurgent movement on Altis still holding open territory. It also entered 1984 with that territory already reduced to the shape of a final battle. Oreokastro remained. The ARF remained. But the north had been cut away around them.

ARF fighter at a position near Mount Thronos, 1983.

THE LAST POSITIONS, 1984

The Island in January

By January 1984, the junta believed that the military phase of the civil conflict was nearing its end. Government communiqués no longer spoke of a contested island, but of order being restored after years of terrorist violence. The regime claimed that anti-government forces had been defeated as open armies and that the state had protected Altis from traitors acting under the direction of foreign interveners. In official language, the campaign of 1984 was not a continuation of civil war. It was the final phase of a counter-terrorist operation.

There was enough truth in the claim to make it convincing. APLA had been broken as a territorial force in the south. The FIA had lost Athira and survived only through Frini, Nychi and clandestine networks. The ARF remained the last movement still holding open territory, but its northern system had been cut apart during the campaigns of 1982 and 1983. Galati, Pyrsos, Syrta, Abdera, Agios Konstantinos, Fothia, Gori, Aristi and Faros had all been lost. Oreokastro remained, but it no longer stood at the centre of a broad republican zone. It had become the last visible centre of one.

Inside the AAF, victory was felt unevenly. The army of 1984 was more professional than the army of 1975. It had learned to use artillery, armour, air power, raiders, helicopter landings, engineers, informants and National Guard clearing units as parts of the same system. It no longer expected the war to be settled by a single road advance or one dramatic assault. It understood heights, roads, supply routes and the slow isolation of insurgent positions.

At the same time, the army was tired. Nine years of war had produced men who were relieved that the main campaigns were ending, but also sceptical of official optimism. Mines still killed drivers on roads that were supposed to be secure. Ambushes still punished careless patrols. A supply truck destroyed in a valley or a conscript shot outside a checkpoint could do more to shape a soldier’s view of victory than any speech from Pyrgos. These losses demoralised some and hardened others. The more the regime declared that the enemy had been defeated, the more every new mine or sniper shot felt like a personal insult.

The civilian mood was just as mixed. In many recovered areas, the population saw no sudden liberation from hardship. Government forces carried out constant filtration, checking documents, searching houses, questioning families and trying to separate civilians from underground networks. These measures turned many people against the AAF, even in places where they had grown tired of the insurgents. Yet basic life slowly improved in some districts. Water systems were repaired. Electricity returned more regularly. Roads became passable again. Markets reopened under surveillance. For many civilians, the regime offered a bitter exchange: less freedom for the return of ordinary necessities.

The junta interpreted this exhaustion as submission. It confused silence with consent and the repair of infrastructure with loyalty. By early 1984, its commanders believed that one final effort could close the war. The remaining tasks were clear: end the FIA’s open presence in the north-west, destroy the ARF’s last territorial centre around Oreokastro, and convert the recovered island into a network of permanent posts, patrol zones and controlled settlements.

Children play among ruins in Abdera, 1984.

Frini and Nychi

AAF recoilless rifle crew near Frini, January 1984.

The first of these tasks was directed against the FIA. During 1983, Nikandros Vakardis had tried to preserve the grey arrangement that allowed his movement to survive in Frini and Nychi. The FIA had fought the ARF, contested the north-western rear and made itself useful to the regime without formally surrendering to it. This position had always depended on the AAF needing the FIA more than it wanted to destroy it.

That balance changed after the fall of Abdera and the reduction of ARF territory. The FIA had lost much of its usefulness as an indirect weapon. Its continued existence in Frini and the port of Nychi became an embarrassment and a potential future threat. The junta could not publicly tolerate an armed movement that had emerged from the pro-government camp, inherited part of the Vakardis network and refused to submit to state authority.

Nikandros continued to negotiate through officers, intermediaries and old security contacts, but the channels were being emptied. Some of the officers with whom he had spoken in 1982 and 1983 were transferred to other postings. Others no longer had authority to promise anything. During the final phase of talks in November 1983, the message became explicit: the junta would accept only unconditional surrender, the transfer of all FIA assets and the surrender of its remaining property and weapons.

The FIA did not accept those terms. In January 1984, the AAF moved.

The operation against Frini and Nychi was simultaneous, fast and precise. Army units struck the belt of FIA strongpoints around Frini while raider teams coordinated the attack on the port. At Nychi, raiders identified and eliminated firing points or directed army fire onto them. FIA positions were suppressed one after another before they could form a coherent defence. The movement had survived for years through mobility and political ambiguity. It was now being attacked as a fixed target.

Nikandros left Frini only when the outer belt of positions around the town had effectively been destroyed. The decision came late enough to show that he had hoped to preserve the town, but early enough to save part of the organisation. As in Athira, the FIA lost an open base without losing its core. Fighters, contacts, money and stores were pushed into safe houses, forest camps and concealed routes. Frini fell relatively cleanly compared with the battles of the previous year.

The junta did not celebrate the operation loudly. Its propaganda preferred to describe the FIA as bandits or criminal remnants rather than as a political enemy. To call the movement by its real history would have reminded the public that a loyal National Guard brigade had once broken with the regime. For a state built on the claim that all patriotic forces stood together against terrorism, the FIA was an uncomfortable subject. It was better to defeat it quietly.

AAF staging area in Frini after its capture, 1984.

The Oreokastro Operation

With Frini and Nychi neutralised as open FIA positions, the northern grouping of the AAF turned fully toward Oreokastro. The operation had no public name. It was planned and directed by the headquarters responsible for the northern front, and its objective was broader than the capture of a single town. The AAF intended to defeat the ARF across its remaining territory and destroy Oreokastro as the movement's main node of resistance.

The plan used several axes. From the south-east, National Guard forces cleared the route from Gori toward the main Kore–Syrta–Oreokastro road, moving from east to west and removing ARF points along the way. From the east, regular army units advanced from Syrta along the main road toward Oreokastro. In the north, AAF forces around Faros pressed against the Synneforos area, where ARF positions still dominated difficult terrain and made progress slow. The aim was to close the last republican territory from more than one direction, not to repeat a simple frontal advance.

Raiders played a constant role. They searched for weapons caches, set ambushes, conducted reconnaissance and moved through mountain routes where regular formations could not operate easily. Reinforced foot patrols disrupted ARF logistics and forced republican units to spend men guarding paths, stores and observation points that had once been safe. The raiders did not win the campaign alone, but they made it harder for the ARF to move inside its own territory.

Oreokastro had enormous symbolic value. It had been one of the earliest centres of republican resistance and had remained a political and military reference point throughout the war. The AAF understood this. There was no formal political order to destroy the town, but senior officers were given enough freedom to treat its destruction as acceptable. The General Staff wanted the ARF's last centre broken in a way that would leave no doubt about the fate of future open resistance.

The ARF expected that Oreokastro might fall. Its leadership had prepared for the possibility of underground survival and had discussed dispersal long before the final operation began. But preparation for defeat was not the same as expecting the town itself to be devastated. The republicans did not evacuate archives, stores or equipment on a large scale before the bombardment. They believed the junta would try to take Oreokastro, not ruin it.

Around 800 ARF fighters were present in the wider Oreokastro area at the beginning of the year. They had no real mechanised reserve. Their mobile assets consisted of armed pickups, logistical vehicles and civilian cars. Their strength lay in local knowledge, mountain routes, experience and the political meaning of the ground they defended. Morale was complex. There was little open division, but some desertions occurred. Revenge, fatalism and the desire to defend the movement's main stronghold existed beside exhaustion and the knowledge that the AAF now had far greater resources.

By February, the pressure was already reducing the number of fighters willing or able to remain in open defensive positions. The ARF still existed as a movement, but its last territorial defence was beginning to shrink before the decisive blows were delivered.

AAF troops observe fire support near Frini, 1984.

The Bombardment

In mid-February, the AAF began the bombardment of Oreokastro. The strikes came in several waves over four days. Aircraft and artillery hit suspected ARF positions inside and around the town, while multiple-launch rocket systems were used in three salvos on the first and third days. The use of rockets against the settlement marked a brutal escalation. It also ensured that the physical destruction of Oreokastro would become part of the memory of the war.

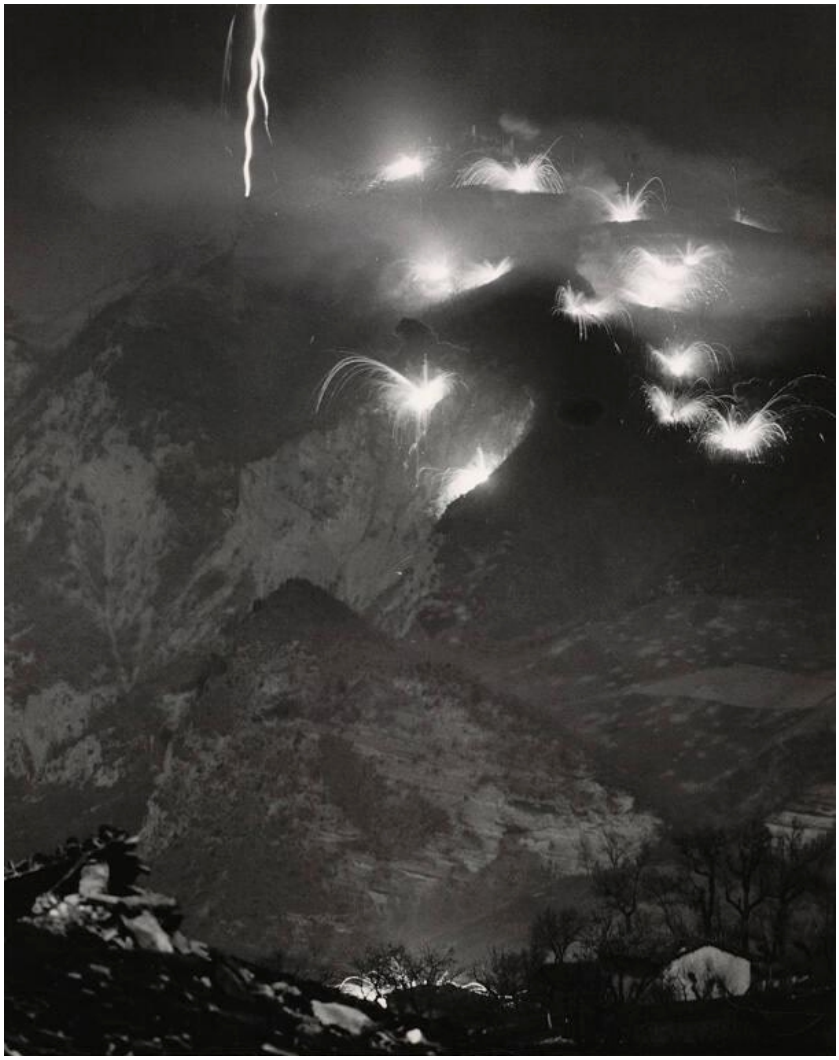
No independent journalists were allowed near the combat zone. The junta released only sparse information, describing the strikes as attacks on terrorist strongpoints and command positions. This silence did not prevent rumours from spreading. Long before government propaganda settled on an explanation, stories circulated across Altis that the AAF had destroyed much of Oreokastro itself.

The effect on the ARF was severe. Some fighters were demoralised by the scale of the strikes. Others became more determined, interpreting the destruction as proof that no compromise with the junta was possible. A smaller number began to act recklessly, launching local counterattacks or refusing withdrawal orders because they believed the final defence of Oreokastro had become a matter of honour. These actions did not change the course of the operation. They increased losses.

After the bombardment, the ARF began to disperse men and surviving property into the surrounding area. It was a partial and improvised process rather than a planned evacuation. Some stores survived and were moved. Others were buried, abandoned or destroyed. Communications became more difficult. Commanders who had expected to organise a fallback from inside the town now had to do so from damaged roads, broken houses and mountain paths under constant observation.

By the time the final ground phase began, the open ARF defence had been reduced drastically. Only 200 to 300 fighters remained in positions that could be described as part of a territorial defence. The rest had been killed, wounded, dispersed, ordered into underground networks or had simply left the open battle.

Only after the ARF’s regular forces around the town had been beaten did the junta begin to offer a fuller public explanation. It claimed that the destruction in Oreokastro had been caused by fierce and fanatical terrorist resistance. The claim was useful, but not widely believed in the areas where refugees, soldiers and rumours carried the story of the bombardment faster than official statements could contain it.



Night artillery shelling near Oreokastro, February 1984.

Aftermath of the shelling of Oreokastro, February 1984.

Synneforos

The northern barrier remained Synneforos. AAF forces near Faros had spent weeks methodically suppressing ARF firing points in the area, but progress was difficult. The ridge gave the republicans observation, cover and firing positions over the routes that government forces needed to use. Even as the ARF weakened elsewhere, Synneforos remained a hard piece of terrain.

In late February, the AAF launched a major helicopter landing against the Synneforos area. The operation was larger than the remaining ARF strength there could match. By this stage, republican resistance was no longer comparable to the force directed against it. The AAF had artillery, air support, raiders, engineers and infantry ready to exploit the landing. The ARF had local positions, small groups and the advantage of terrain, but not enough men to turn the fight into another Magos or Pyrsos.

AAF raiders land on Mount Synneforos, February 1984.

The clearing of Synneforos and its surroundings took three to four days. ARF groups resisted in pockets, using the ridge, mines and ambush points to delay government movement. The main problem for the AAF soon became less the enemy's fire than the ground itself. Mine clearance, engineer reconnaissance and the restoration of usable routes consumed time. Roads and paths had to be checked before vehicles could move safely. Suspected stores and shelters had to be searched. Every delay gave more ARF fighters time to disappear into the wider mountain area.

Still, the fall of Synneforos broke the northern side of the last open ARF defence. It also made the final advance on Oreokastro possible from more than one direction. The republicans could no longer rely on the ridge to protect movement between the town, Faros, Thronos and the remaining western routes.

Thronos and Oreokastro

Between 23 February and 4 March, the AAF advanced toward Oreokastro from the Faros direction and along the main road from Syrta. The movement was not a single uninterrupted rush. Government units paused repeatedly to clear mines, repair routes, suppress ambush points and bring up supplies. The ARF still knew the terrain and could still punish careless movement, but its ability to hold continuous positions had been broken.

Thronos fell on 2 March. The AAF suppressed the firing points and ambush positions around it before pushing through to the height. By then, the local ARF defence was no longer strong enough to hold after Synneforos had been lost. Thronos was important, but it did not become a prolonged battle. Its fall removed another position that could have covered movement into the Oreokastro area.

On 4 March, government troops entered Oreokastro. The assault was carried out by joint army and National Guard forces. The town was heavily damaged. In several areas, the destruction caused by artillery, air strikes and rockets had done more to change the battlefield than the remaining defenders. Only a few ARF firing points remained inside the town itself, and these were quickly suppressed.

Oreokastro was taken, but not in the form the AAF had once expected. It was not a captured rebel capital filled with prisoners, intact offices and useful propaganda trophies. It was a damaged settlement, partly emptied, partly ruined and already abandoned by much of the movement it had symbolised. The AAF had destroyed the last open centre of the ARF. It had not trapped the whole ARF inside it.

After the Town

In Oreokastro, the AAF found a hospital, several surviving weapons caches and fragments of the infrastructure the ARF had used during the final period of territorial control. Some documents and equipment had been lost in the bombardment. Some had been moved after the strikes began. Some remained in the ruins because there had been no time to recover them.

The first days after the capture were dominated by searches, filtration and the securing of approaches. National Guard units screened civilians and prisoners. Army specialists examined stores, damaged buildings and suspected routes out of the town. The AAF quickly understood that the ARF leadership had not been captured. The movement's political and military core had gone into the mountains, forests and village networks around the former stronghold.

A week later, government propaganda teams filmed in Oreokastro. The official narrative presented the ruins as the result of fanatical ARF resistance. The images were intended to show the cost of terrorism and the final defeat of the republican centre. Yet the same images could be read differently by those who already distrusted the regime. For them, Oreokastro became evidence of what the AAF was willing to do once no observers were present.

The ARF adapted quickly to the loss. Its remaining leadership moved underground. Forests and mountain areas around Oreokastro became bases for small groups, guides, couriers and armed cells. Up to a hundred active members remained under arms in those areas, not as a field army, but as the nucleus of a renewed guerrilla structure. Others returned to civilian life, hid weapons or waited for instructions.

The fall of Oreokastro ended the ARF's open territorial phase. It did not end the movement. It changed what ARF activity looked like. There would be fewer flags, fewer defensive lines and no town to call a centre. There would be more mines, snipers, recruiters, night movement and attacks on isolated targets.

AAF armored car patrols the outskirts of Oreokastro, 1984.

The Mine War

In the south, APLA had already made that transition. By 1984, its mine war reached its peak. The areas around Zaros, Poliakko, Edessa, Alikampos, the former Altis Aeroclub airfield and parts of the southern coast all suffered attacks. Some weeks saw one incident; others saw several. The targets were usually military vehicles, patrol routes and supply movements, but civilians were not spared. Mines placed for AAF trucks could kill farmers, passengers or workers moving along the same roads.

The effect was greater than the number of casualties alone. A road reopened by the government could be closed again by one explosion. A village declared secure could become suspect after a patrol was hit nearby. Engineers cleared routes, but APLA cells learned to wait, re-mine and vary their methods. The movement could no longer govern the south, but it could still make government control uncertain.

Graffiti began appearing on walls in southern towns: APLA is alive. The words were simple and effective. They did not claim victory. They denied disappearance. For civilians, the slogan could be read as warning, hope or threat, depending on who saw it and what the movement had done in that area.

One of APLA's most notable attacks occurred at the former Altis Aeroclub airfield. The AAF had been restoring parts of the site for military use, and a mid-ranking officer responsible for coordinating close air support was scheduled to visit. APLA learned of the visit in advance and organised a mortar attack on the airfield. The strike was not precise in the professional sense, but it was lucky. The officer was killed during the shelling.

The attack had symbolic and practical value. It showed that APLA could still obtain information about AAF movements and strike sites connected to air support. It also embarrassed a regime that claimed the south had been pacified. The AAF responded with searches, arrests and sweeps in nearby areas, but these did not end the mine war.

The foreign dimension also persisted. During 1984, AAF forces intercepted several small vessels along the southern coast, including fishing boats and one trawler. The boats did not belong to MEC, but the cargoes suggested an external supply route: weapons, radios, medical supplies, money and ammunition. Publicly, the regime referred to foreign-backed supply routes. In private, some officers were more direct and stated that the material was coming from MEC channels.

APLA no longer possessed a front. It did not need one to remain dangerous.

AAF vehicle destroyed by a mine in southern Altis, 1984.

Republican Remnants

After Oreokastro, ARF activity shifted into the mountains and recovered towns of the north-west. The most visible expression was the so-called sniper war around the former republican area. The term described several things at once: individual shooters acting on their own, organised ARF teams targeting patrols and the growing legend that every exposed road or slope near Oreokastro might be watched. The legend mattered. It slowed movement, tired soldiers and made even routine patrols feel like deliberate risks.

ARF fighters attacked isolated patrols, ambushed small groups and fired on posts from terrain that made pursuit difficult. The AAF could respond with sweeps and artillery, but the enemy was no longer holding fixed positions. A shot from a ridge could lead to a search that found nothing. A patrol could spend hours moving through empty ground after a single casualty. This was not enough to restore ARF territory, but it was enough to keep the north-west from feeling pacified.

In May 1984, the ARF carried out its most significant post-Oreokastro attack. A National Guard barracks in Fothia, where guardsmen were quartered, was struck by a coordinated assault. A truck filled with explosives was detonated, and ARF attackers then penetrated the camp during the confusion. Eleven National Guardsmen were killed either in the explosion or in the short fight that followed. Four more later died of wounds in hospital.

ARF sniper, 1984.

The AAF blamed republican remnants. The ARF tried to spread word that the attack was its work. The distinction mattered to both sides. For the regime, the attackers were remnants because the organisation had supposedly been defeated. For the ARF, the attack was proof that the loss of Oreokastro had not destroyed its ability to plan and strike.

The AAF also arrested several ARF recruiters in Syrta and Agios Konstantinos during May. These were not merely random suspects used for propaganda. They were real activists attempting to rebuild local networks under government occupation. Their arrest showed that the ARF had begun to shift from territorial command to recruitment, hidden cells and village-level influence. It also showed that the AAF's victory had forced the movement into a more dangerous form: less visible, but harder to eliminate completely.

Bandits

The FIA was quieter after the January operation, but it also survived. Nikandros Vakardis retained direct contacts with AFMC, and the remains of the movement withdrew into camps, safe houses and concealed stores. Unlike the ARF, the FIA did not need to prove immediately that it was alive. Its priority was preservation.

Several clashes occurred when AAF patrols approached areas used by hidden FIA groups. These were not large attacks. The FIA fired, withdrew and then relocated its camps before the AAF could bring heavier forces into the area. The movement had learned from the loss of Frini and Nychi that fixed positions could not be defended once the regime decided to destroy them. Survival required movement and silence.

In April 1984, a car bomb exploded in Athira. The attack was attributed to the FIA, although the regime avoided discussing the movement's political identity in detail. Official statements described those responsible as bandits and criminals. This language was deliberate. The junta did not want to reopen the question of the 5th Brigade, the Vakardis network or the fact that an anti-communist force once rooted in the pro-government security system had turned against it.

The FIA's underground differed from both APLA and the ARF. It was smaller than it had once been, more cautious and more dependent on external contacts. It did not launch a broad campaign in the spring of 1984. It waited, preserved its channels and avoided unnecessary exposure. If AFMC ever moved against the junta, the FIA intended to remain useful.

Major Operations Have Ended

AAF soldier on patrol, 1984.

A few days after the fall of Oreokastro, the junta announced that major operations had ended. The wording was important. It did not declare the end of a civil war, because the regime had never accepted that term. It declared the completion of major counter-terrorist operations and the restoration of state order across Altis.

The military system was reorganised accordingly. Up to seventy percent of the units that had taken part in major operations returned to permanent bases. These bases, however, were now spread across the island. The return to garrison life did not mean a return to the pre-war state. The army and National Guard remained distributed through recovered towns, roads, airfields and strategic points. New permanent posts were established in liberated territories, replacing temporary front positions with garrisons intended to hold indefinitely.

Checkpoints remained everywhere. Military patrols continued to move through towns and countryside. Territorial Defence was not dissolved. Officially, it remained a temporary measure and was expected to be reduced or disbanded by the end of the year. In practice, the regime still needed local loyalists, armed auxiliaries and men who could watch roads, villages and neighbourhoods when regular units were stretched.

For many soldiers, the declaration of restored order felt incomplete. The front lines had disappeared, but the reports had not. Mines in the south, snipers in the north-west, attacks in Fothia, arrests in Syrta and Agios Konstantinos, suspected FIA activity and rumours of foreign supply all continued after the announcement. The junta said the major operations were over. The army continued to count losses.

The new system therefore had two faces. To the public, it was the return of administration: flags, electricity, police stations, repaired water systems and official statements. On the ground, it was a dense military order of posts, patrols, informants, searches and armed men. The state had returned. Peace had not.

The Waters Around Altis

While the regime tried to consolidate the island, the waters around Altis became more active. Beginning in March 1984, during the final stages of the AAF's last major operations, the junta issued claims that AFMC vessels had violated Altian territorial waters. It was never clear whether these violations had occurred as described or whether the regime exaggerated them for political effect. The claims were not necessarily baseless. AFMC ships had been operating close enough to make the accusations plausible.

MEC activity also increased. One incident became especially serious. A MEC reconnaissance aircraft flew directly over an AAF boat, apparently testing the limits of what the government would tolerate. The AAF crew opened fire with the intention of hitting the aircraft. The plane was not shot down, and there were no losses, but the precedent mattered. For the first time, the external contest around Altis had produced an armed incident involving government forces and a foreign military aircraft.

The junta interpreted these events as pressure, reconnaissance and provocation. It did not treat them as evidence of an imminent invasion. In the regime's view, AFMC and MEC were trying to intimidate the government, measure its reactions, test patrol patterns and support underground networks. A direct intervention was considered unlikely. The AAF believed that the island was too dangerous, too politically complicated and too close to Soviet interests on Stratis for outside forces to move openly.

Stratis remained a special case. None of the external actors approached it in the same way they approached Altis. The Soviet military presence there guaranteed a status quo that neither AFMC nor MEC wanted to challenge directly. The struggle was around Altis: its ports, airspace, territorial waters, insurgent networks and weakened but still functioning state.

This was the mistake in the junta's reading of the situation. It saw pressure, but not preparation. It saw incidents, but not necessarily the shape that a future intervention might take. The regime had spent years fighting internal enemies supported from outside. It was less prepared for a situation in which outside forces might use those internal enemies as part of a new campaign.

The Eastern Attacks

In the first days of June, attacks began in the east of Altis. The targets were unusual. Air-defence positions, radar sites and warehouses were struck in a series of incidents that did not fit the normal pattern of insurgent warfare. These were not checkpoints on contested roads or patrols moving through old rebel districts. They were elements of the government's military infrastructure in an area long regarded as deep rear.

Several warehouses exploded. Radar and air-defence positions were damaged. The junta concealed information about casualties, describing some incidents as isolated terrorist actions and saying nothing about others. The lack of clarity deepened the unease inside the AAF. The eastern part of the island had not been a major battlefield. If attackers could reach these targets, then the distinction between pacified areas and contested areas had become less meaningful.

The attackers were not identified. They may have been insurgents working for an external force. They may have been foreign saboteurs. They may have been a mixture of both. The AAF increasingly stopped distinguishing between APLA, ARF and FIA in its public language, placing all armed opponents into the same category of terrorists and radicals. This helped propaganda, but it did not help analysis.

The choice of targets suggested preparation for something larger. Air-defence sites and radar positions were not the usual priorities of guerrillas fighting for local survival. They mattered to aircraft, ships and external forces planning movement around the island. The attacks occurred while both AFMC and MEC activity around Altis was increasing. The connection was obvious enough to worry officers, but not clear enough to produce a single confirmed explanation.

By 5 and 6 June, the regime still controlled the towns, roads, ports, airfields and official outposts of Altis. None of the insurgent movements held open territory. The AAF had completed the visible reconquest of the island. Yet APLA remained active in the south, the ARF remained armed in the mountains, the FIA remained connected to outside channels, and unidentified attackers had struck military infrastructure in the east.

The historical war had reached its end point. The map belonged to the junta. The forces beneath it did not.

CHRONOLOGY

1949 — The post-war political order on Altis begins to take shape, creating the institutions and social divisions that later define the First Republic.

1960 — Altis becomes independent, and the First Republic is established.

1963 — Republican elections consolidate parliamentary politics, but deepen the rivalry between conservative, nationalist and left-wing movements.

1966 — Economic strain, refugee issues and labour unrest weaken the authority of the First Republic.

1967 — The military overthrows the First Republic and establishes the Altian junta.

1968 — The National Guard expands into one of the regime's main instruments of internal security.

1970–1973 — Inflation, fuel shortages and repression undermine the junta's claims of stability and prosperity.

24 July 1974 — The fall of the Greek junta after the Cyprus crisis encourages opposition activity on Altis.

8 August 1974 — Police open fire on demonstrators in Syrta, killing four and wounding eleven.

September 1974 — Altis enters a surge of political violence as raids, arrests and underground organising intensify.

Late 1974 — ARF and APLA structures emerge as the main armed opponents of the junta.

24 April 1975 — ARF and APLA launch coordinated attacks against government positions across Altis.

April–May 1975 — ARF holds Oreokastro against early AAF counterattacks.

August 1975 — APLA captures Zaros, creating its most important southern stronghold.

November 1975 — The Frini garrison defects to the ARF.

1976 — APLA expands in the south, but AAF counteroffensives begin to break the movement's open front.

2 February 1977 — APLA launches its raid on Pyrgos after the fighting around Charkia.

4 February 1977 — ARF opens its northern offensive against Galati, Abdera and the surrounding heights.

March 1977 — Pyrsos and Abdera fall to the ARF, and the Syrta garrison later surrenders.

3 April 1977 — A humanitarian ceasefire is declared between the AAF and ARF around Syrta and Agios Dionysios.

8 April 1977 — The 5th National Guard Brigade destroys Orino, killing at least ninety civilians.

Mid-1977 — The anti-junta front breaks apart as APLA and ARF begin fighting around Agios Dionysios.

1978 — The junta's relationship with the Eastern Bloc deepens through air-defence, radar and military infrastructure projects.

1978–1979 — The war economy expands through weapons, fuel, humanitarian aid, antiquities and opium trafficking.

Autumn 1979 — The AAF retakes Agios Dionysios from APLA.

13 August 1980 — Kostas Vakardis is killed by a car bomb in Athira.

Late August 1980 — The 5th National Guard Brigade mutinies and becomes the core of the FIA.

Autumn 1980 — The AAF opens a major southern offensive against APLA while ARF captures Mount Magos and Negades.

Early 1981 — The AAF recovers Athira as the FIA withdraws into hidden networks and moves toward Frini.

Early 1981 — Zaros falls to the AAF, breaking the centre of APLA's southern territorial system.

Summer 1981 — AAF pincer operations from Zaros, Alikampos and Panochori collapse APLA positions around Poliakko and Edessa.

Late 1981 — APLA is defeated as a regular force and forced back into guerrilla war.

1982 — FIA and ARF fight the five-day battle of Krya Nera, which ARF wins with mechanised reserves.

1982 — The AAF takes Mount Magos and Mount Kira, increasing pressure on Agios Konstantinos.

Late 1982 — The AAF captures Galati and begins the winter battle for Pyrsos.

January 1983 — Pyrsos falls to the AAF.

March 1983 — The AAF captures Agios Minas, forcing ARF to abandon Syrta.

April 1983 — Abdera falls after a week-long mechanised assault, followed by the capture of the northern airfield.

May 1983 — National Guard forces take Agios Konstantinos, Gori and Fothia.

Autumn 1983 — The AAF reaches Faros after a slow advance from the Abdera airfield through Aristi.

January 1984 — The AAF destroys FIA's open presence in Frini and Nychi, forcing the movement underground.

Mid-February 1984 — The AAF bombards Oreokastro with aircraft, artillery and multiple-launch rocket systems.

Late February 1984 — AAF forces land on Synneforos and clear the surrounding heights.

2 March 1984 — Thronos falls to government forces.

4 March 1984 — The AAF enters the heavily damaged Oreokastro, ending ARF's open territorial phase.

Spring 1984 — APLA's mine war peaks in the south, while ARF and FIA continue underground attacks.

May 1984 — ARF attacks a National Guard barracks in Fothia, killing eleven guardsmen immediately and four more later from wounds.

March–June 1984 — AFMC and MEC activity around Altis increases, while Stratis remains untouched due to the Soviet military presence there.

Early June 1984 — Unidentified attackers strike air-defence positions, radar sites and warehouses in eastern Altis.

By 10 June 1984 — The AAF controls the island's towns and outposts, but APLA, ARF and FIA remain active underground.

FACTIONS

Altis Armed Forces

By the early 1980s, the Altis Armed Forces had become a highly mobile and battle-hardened force, shaped by almost a decade of continuous civil war. Their structure and methods reflected the realities of the conflict: limited resources, heavy losses, shifting front lines, and the need to deploy whatever units and equipment were available for the task at hand.

The AAF inventory was unusually diverse, combining Western and Eastern Bloc weapons in the same formations. T-54 and M48 tanks, MiG-21 and F-4 Phantom II aircraft, early AH-1 Cobra helicopters and newer Mi-24 gunships could all be found in government service. This mixture was less the result of doctrine than necessity. In wartime conditions, the AAF kept almost every serviceable vehicle, aircraft, and weapon in use, regardless of origin, age, or logistical inconvenience.

Despite this lack of standardization, the AAF proved capable of organizing its disparate assets into effective combined operations. Army units formed the backbone of the force, providing the main infantry, armor, and fire support elements. Territorial Defence units were used for rear-area security, checkpoints, local patrols, and the protection of settlements whose terrain and population they knew well. The National Guard, better equipped and often used in the hardest fighting, served as the government's heavy assault element during major offensives and urban operations.

In practice, the AAF was not a polished peacetime army, but a force adapted to survival. Its strength lay in mobility, experience, and an ability to improvise with a wide range of weapons and formations. By 1984, it remained the most powerful military institution on Altis, although increasingly worn down by years of war and increasingly dependent on harsh counterinsurgency methods to hold the territory still under government control.

Territorial Defence

The Territorial Defence units were formed from loyalist irregulars, pro-government militia groups, and local armed supporters of the junta, usually reinforced by attached army officers, NCOs, and technical specialists. They were not intended to serve as regular front-line troops, but as a second-line force responsible for rear-area security, checkpoints, local patrols, and the defence of towns and villages under government control.

Their equipment varied greatly from unit to unit. In theory, the Territorial Defence received weapons and ammunition from government stocks. In practice, its fighters used whatever they could obtain: rifles issued by the army, weapons captured in combat, arms bought privately, and equipment quietly diverted from military deliveries. As a result, a single detachment could contain an extraordinary mixture of modern and obsolete small arms.

This lack of standardization became one of the defining features of the Territorial Defence. AR-15-pattern carbines could appear alongside old bolt-action rifles, wartime submachine guns, StG 44 assault rifles, Thompson SMGs, and various captured Eastern Bloc weapons. While this made supply and training difficult, it also reflected the improvised nature of the Altian war. The Territorial Defence was rarely elegant, but it gave the government a broad network of armed local forces able to hold ground, guard roads, and support regular AAF operations when required.

Army

After the reorganizations of 1982–1983, the regular Army units of the AAF emerged as the main field component of the government forces. Their equipment still reflected the mixed origins of Altis' wartime arsenal, combining both Western and Eastern Bloc patterns, but the reforms attempted to impose at least a limited degree of order on this diversity. In small arms, the practical goal was to reduce logistical complexity around three principal calibres: 7.62×51mm NATO, 7.62×39mm, and 7.62×54R.

The continued use of 7.62×51mm weapons was largely unavoidable. Large stocks of FAL-pattern rifles remained in army depots, and the AAF lacked both the time and the resources to replace them completely. Alongside these weapons, regular units also fielded AK-pattern rifles, machine guns, and captured or reissued arms, depending on availability and operational need.

AAF Army troops were usually identified by their Altian lizard-pattern camouflage, black scarves, and dark field caps or headgear. Their load-bearing equipment was as varied as their weapons: American ALICE webbing could be seen beside locally modified rigs, improvised chest harnesses, and Chinese-style load-bearing vests. This mixture gave the Army a rough appearance, but by 1984 it had become part of its recognizable field identity.

As the backbone of the junta's armed forces, the Army provided the main infantry, armor, and fire support elements for most government operations. Its units were generally better trained and more disciplined than the Territorial Defence, and many had accumulated years of combat experience. Although worn down by constant fighting, the regular Army remained a serious threat to any opponent and formed the core around which larger AAF offensives were built.

National Guard

The AAF National Guard originated from the pro-junta right-wing paramilitary formations of the early military regime. Initially used as an instrument of the junta's "dirty war" against political opponents and suspected insurgent sympathizers, these units were gradually transformed by the civil war. What began as armed loyalist squads and clearance detachments developed into some of the most aggressive and heavily equipped formations within the government forces.

By the early 1980s, the National Guard had become the AAF's principal heavy assault element. Its units were used in urban fighting, clearing operations, and the control of areas considered too dangerous or politically sensitive for ordinary security forces. National Guardsmen had a reputation for ideological commitment, harsh discipline, and extreme violence, making them both feared and relied upon by the junta.

After the reorganizations of 1982–1983, the National Guard was fully integrated into the AAF command structure. Army officers, engineers, forward observers, and other specialists were attached to National Guard formations, allowing them to operate with artillery, armor, and air support during major offensives. This made the National Guard more than a militia force: by 1984, it functioned as an elite assault arm within the wider AAF system.

National Guard troops were commonly identified by brown ERDL-pattern camouflage, Western-style protective equipment, and their distinctive orange berets. Their weapons were mostly drawn from Western sources and were centered around 5.56×45mm and 7.62×51mm ammunition. Although still varied in origin, this equipment made National Guard units better supplied and more standardized than most other loyalist formations, especially when committed to major operations.

Raiders

The AAF Raiders are a professional special forces element built around selected regular army personnel. They provide the government with a force capable of operating beyond the reach of ordinary infantry units, carrying out long-range reconnaissance, deep patrols, artillery and air-support coordination, sabotage missions, and attacks against rebel logistics points.

Unlike regular army formations, Raider teams operate in small groups, often far from the nearest government position. Their tasks require endurance, fieldcraft, and the ability to move through hostile territory with limited support. In many operations, their role is not to hold ground, but to locate targets, disrupt enemy movement, and guide heavier AAF firepower onto positions that cannot be reached by conventional patrols.

Mobility is central to their employment. Raider units can reach their objectives by long foot marches through rough terrain or by helicopter insertion, allowing them to appear behind enemy lines with little warning. Once in position, they can observe roads, mark targets, ambush supply parties, or prepare the ground for larger government operations.

By 1984, the Raiders are one of the most capable and flexible elements of the AAF. They are too few to influence the war by numbers alone, but their ability to operate independently, coordinate supporting fires, and strike at vulnerable rear-area targets makes them an important tool in the government's counterinsurgency campaign.

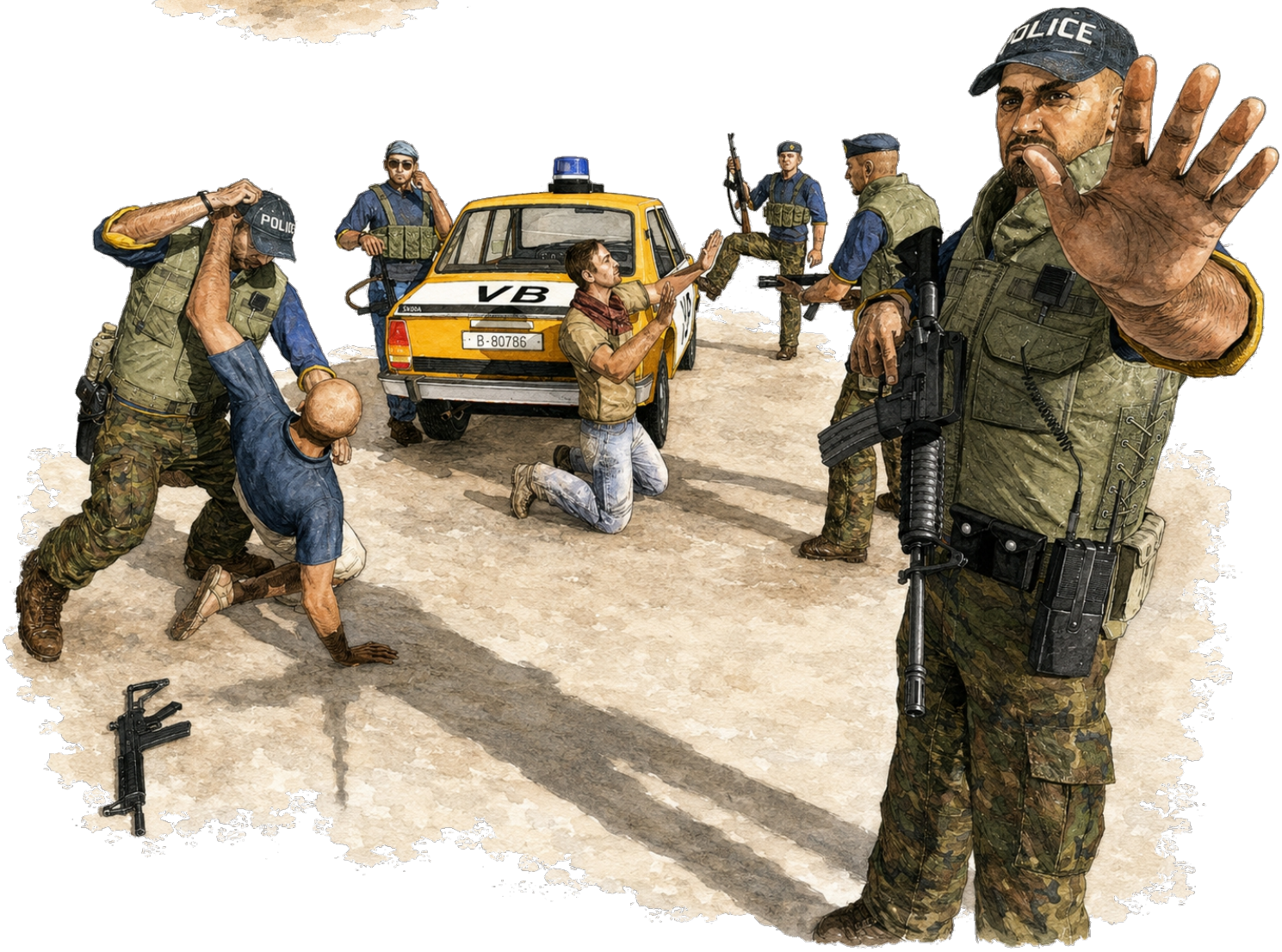
100 CRTG. NATO
LINK M9
4-BALL M80
1-TRACER M62

Vigilance Bureau

After the coup of 1967, the police structures of Altis were placed under the authority of the National Guard. Over time, this relationship shaped both their appearance and their conduct. The police inherited part of the National Guard's equipment, uniform practices, and methods, gradually becoming less a conventional civil police force and more an armed instrument of internal security.

During the civil war, the security situation inside government-held towns and villages deteriorated sharply. Bombings, ambushes, assassinations, and insurgent infiltration changed the nature of routine police work. By the early 1980s, body armor and assault rifles had become common features of police patrols, especially in areas considered vulnerable to rebel activity.

The official name of these police structures was the Vigilance Bureau, usually abbreviated as VB on vehicles and signs. Its patrol cars and vans were often painted in a distinctive orange color, visually linking the Bureau to the National Guard system from which it had emerged. The white VB markings made these vehicles instantly recognizable on the streets of Altis and reinforced the Bureau's role as the visible face of the junta's authority in everyday life.



POLIS

Altis Republican Forces

The Altis Republican Forces were one of the largest armed opposition movements on Altis. Formed during the first years of the civil war from anti-junta activists, local defence groups, former soldiers, rural networks, and independent guerrilla bands, the ARF never developed into a conventional army. Instead, it functioned as a loose military and political front united by opposition to the junta and by the demand for a return to republican rule.

The movement was politically diverse and often difficult to control. Its commanders included former officers, local notables, deserters, village fighters, nationalists, liberals, and men whose authority came less from formal rank than from personal reputation and local support. This loose structure limited the ARF's ability to conduct large coordinated operations, but it also made the movement hard to destroy. Individual units could survive independently, disperse under pressure, and reappear when government forces moved away.

The ARF was strongest in the mountainous and rural districts of northern Altis, where its fighters relied on local knowledge, village support, smuggling routes, and difficult terrain. Ambushes, mines, raids, and short attacks against isolated government positions became the movement's preferred methods of warfare. Oreokastro and the surrounding highlands were especially associated with the ARF, while smaller cells operated around roads, settlements, and agricultural areas.

Its equipment was as irregular as its organization. ARF fighters used captured AAF weapons, privately purchased arms, old hunting rifles, foreign surplus, and weapons obtained through the island's wartime black market. By the early 1980s, some ARF units had become experienced and well armed, but the movement as a whole retained the appearance of a guerrilla force: practical, local, and improvised rather than standardized.

By 1984, the ARF had survived years of offensives, internal disputes, arrests, and reprisals. It remained one of the junta's most persistent enemies — less powerful than the regular AAF in open battle, but deeply rooted in the communities and terrain where government control was weakest.

Mobile Forces

During the civil war, the ARF made extensive use of vehicles captured from the AAF. Although the movement lacked the resources to build a large mechanized force, it benefited from the presence of former army drivers, mechanics, and technical specialists who were able to keep captured vehicles running. Even a small number of armored cars or armed trucks could significantly increase the striking power of a local ARF group.

These mobile forces were rarely used for prolonged engagements. Their value lay in speed, surprise, and the ability to appear where government troops did not expect them. ARF commanders used captured vehicles for ambushes, rapid raids, flanking attacks, and sudden withdrawals before heavier AAF units could respond. In difficult terrain, a few well-handled vehicles could disrupt convoys, overrun isolated posts, or support infantry attacks long enough to change the course of a local battle.

Panhard armored cars were especially valued by the ARF. Light, fast, and familiar to many former AAF personnel, they were useful for reconnaissance, escort duties, and hit-and-run attacks along rural roads. When armored vehicles were unavailable, ARF workshops improvised their own solutions, modifying trucks and pickups with welded armor plates, sandbags, and mounted heavy machine guns.

The result was a small but dangerous mobile arm. It could not match the AAF in open battle, and its vehicles were often difficult to maintain, but it gave the ARF a level of tactical flexibility unusual for a guerrilla movement. By the early 1980s, armed pickups, captured armored cars, and improvised gun trucks had become one of the most recognizable elements of ARF field operations.

Moutain Warfare

The ARF always understood that it could offer little resistance to the AAF in conventional open battle. Its real strength came from the terrain. During the civil war, ARF fighters became highly experienced in mountain warfare, using the highlands of northern Altis not simply as shelter, but as an active part of their defensive system.

Small fire groups, concealed positions, and fortified points on dominant heights allowed the ARF to control areas far beyond the ground it physically occupied. A ridge, village approach, or mountain road could be covered by weapons sited well above the line of advance, forcing government troops to move slowly and cautiously even when no large rebel force was present.

A small ARF detachment with a sniper, a machine gunner, and a grenadier could hold up much larger enemy formations if it occupied the right position. These groups rarely tried to destroy the enemy outright. Their purpose was to delay, disorganize, and exhaust AAF units, drawing them into difficult terrain where artillery, armor, and air support were less decisive.

By the early 1980s, this approach had become one of the defining features of ARF warfare. The movement's mountain positions were often crude, but carefully placed and difficult to reduce. For the AAF, clearing a single height could require hours of fighting, engineering work, and close fire support — only for the defenders to withdraw and reappear on the next ridge.

Local Networks

The ARF's strength does not rest only on its armed units in the field. Much of the movement's resilience comes from its local networks: sympathizers, informants, couriers, safe houses, hidden weapons caches, and small stay-behind groups inside settlements that appear to be under government control.

This underground structure allows the ARF to maintain a presence in towns and villages even after government troops enter them. Local cells can remain inactive for long periods, blending into the civilian population until conditions are favorable. When required, these groups can assemble quickly, guide outside fighters into the area, attack a local garrison, support an ambush, or help organize a strike against a convoy.

In quieter periods, these networks continue to serve the movement in less visible ways. They collect information on patrol routes, checkpoints, arrests, supply deliveries, and the movement of government units. They also distribute messages, spread rumors, maintain contact between isolated groups, and help move people, weapons, and supplies through areas where open ARF activity would be too dangerous.

For this reason, government control over a settlement does not always mean the destruction of ARF influence. A village may be searched, occupied, and patrolled, yet still contain couriers, observers, hidden rifles, or families willing to shelter fighters for a night. This hidden infrastructure makes the ARF difficult to eliminate and allows it to reappear in places where it has supposedly been cleared.

Altis People's Liberation Army

The APLA begins as the political heir to the DAG and as one of the earliest organized resistance forces against the junta. Its first supporters present the movement as a defender of the rights, dignity, and honor of those pushed to the margins of Altian society: refugees, workers, and communities subjected to state violence after the military takeover.

At its core, the APLA is the armed bloc of several left-radical political groups. In the early years of the civil war, material support from the Eastern Bloc allows the movement to expand far beyond underground activism. With weapons, training, and external assistance, it is able to organize a broad front of resistance and, for a time, challenge government forces in open battle.

The movement's political character remains central to its identity. APLA cadres combine military activity with propaganda, recruitment, and political work among the population. Workers' districts, refugee communities, student circles, and families affected by government repression provide the movement with supporters, couriers, informants, and recruits. For many of its members, armed struggle is presented not simply as a military necessity, but as part of a wider revolutionary project.

This gives the APLA a stronger sense of discipline and ideological purpose than many other armed groups on Altis. Its fighters are expected to see themselves not only as guerrillas, but as members of a political-military organization. Even when its field units are poorly supplied, the movement places great value on internal structure, secrecy, loyalty, and the ability to continue operating under pressure.

By 1984, the APLA no longer fights as the open field force it once hoped to become. Years of offensives, losses, arrests, and changing foreign support have pushed much of the movement back underground. Its surviving organization is smaller, harder, and more cautious, built around cells, hidden supply routes, safe houses, and militants able to operate inside or near government-controlled areas.

Yet the APLA remains active and dangerous. It maintains pressure on junta forces through guerrilla attacks, urban militancy, sabotage, indirect fire, and sudden strikes against exposed positions. Its strength no longer lies in holding territory, but in remaining politically rooted, operationally hidden, and difficult to destroy. By the final phase of the war, the APLA survives less as a conventional insurgent army than as a persistent revolutionary underground.

Mortar Warfare

Even after government offensives drive much of the APLA back underground, the movement retains the ability to launch sudden and painful strikes. Mobile mortar teams become one of its most effective tools, allowing small groups of fighters to hit targets far beyond the reach of ordinary infantry weapons.

In southern Altis, these mortar teams are a constant problem for the junta's forces. Airfields, garrisons, checkpoints, supply areas, and even residential districts can come under sudden fire, often with little warning. The attacks are rarely intended to hold ground or begin a larger battle. Their purpose is to disrupt, exhaust, and remind the government that no secured area is entirely safe.

The threat of mortar fire forces the AAF to disperse vehicles, harden positions, move supplies under guard, and keep patrols searching for possible firing points. This imposes a constant security burden on government units already stretched by checkpoints, convoy protection, and urban control. Even when casualties are limited, the psychological effect of sudden indirect fire can be considerable.

APLA mortar crews rely on mobility, concealment, and local support. A team can move into position, fire a short barrage, and disappear before government troops can identify the firing point. By the time patrols, helicopters, or counter-battery fire arrive, the crew has often already broken down its weapon and vanished into nearby streets, groves, hills, or safe houses.

This form of warfare gives the APLA a kind of portable artillery. It cannot match the heavy firepower of the AAF, but it allows the movement to keep pressure on government positions without exposing large formations. By 1984, mobile mortar attacks have become one of the clearest signs that the APLA remains dangerous even after losing much of its former ability to fight in the open.

Aerial Denial

By 1984, the APLA possesses only a limited number of man-portable air-defence systems, but even this small capability has an effect far greater than its numbers suggest. The movement cannot challenge the AAF in the air directly, yet it can make low-level aviation support costly, uncertain, and politically dangerous.

Successful launches are rare, but each one has a powerful psychological and operational impact. The loss of a helicopter or attack aircraft forces the government to reconsider how freely it can use air power over contested areas. Pilots become more cautious, commanders hesitate before sending aircraft into uncertain conditions, and routine flights begin to require more planning, protection, and justification.

For the APLA, this is the main value of MANPADS. They are not used to create a conventional air-defence network, but to deny the enemy complete confidence. A single missile team, hidden within a broader underground structure, can make an entire district feel unsafe for helicopters, transport aircraft, and low-flying strike missions.

This threat is especially important in the south, where the AAF depends on helicopters for patrols, rapid troop movement, fire support, and supply flights. Even when no missile is fired, the possibility of one changes government behavior. Aircraft fly less freely, avoid certain areas, or operate with greater caution, reducing the speed and flexibility that normally give the AAF an advantage.

The APLA's aerial denial capability therefore works as much through fear as through actual destruction. The missiles are scarce, their operators few, and opportunities limited, but their existence forces the junta to treat the sky as contested. For an underground movement unable to match government firepower, that uncertainty is itself a weapon.

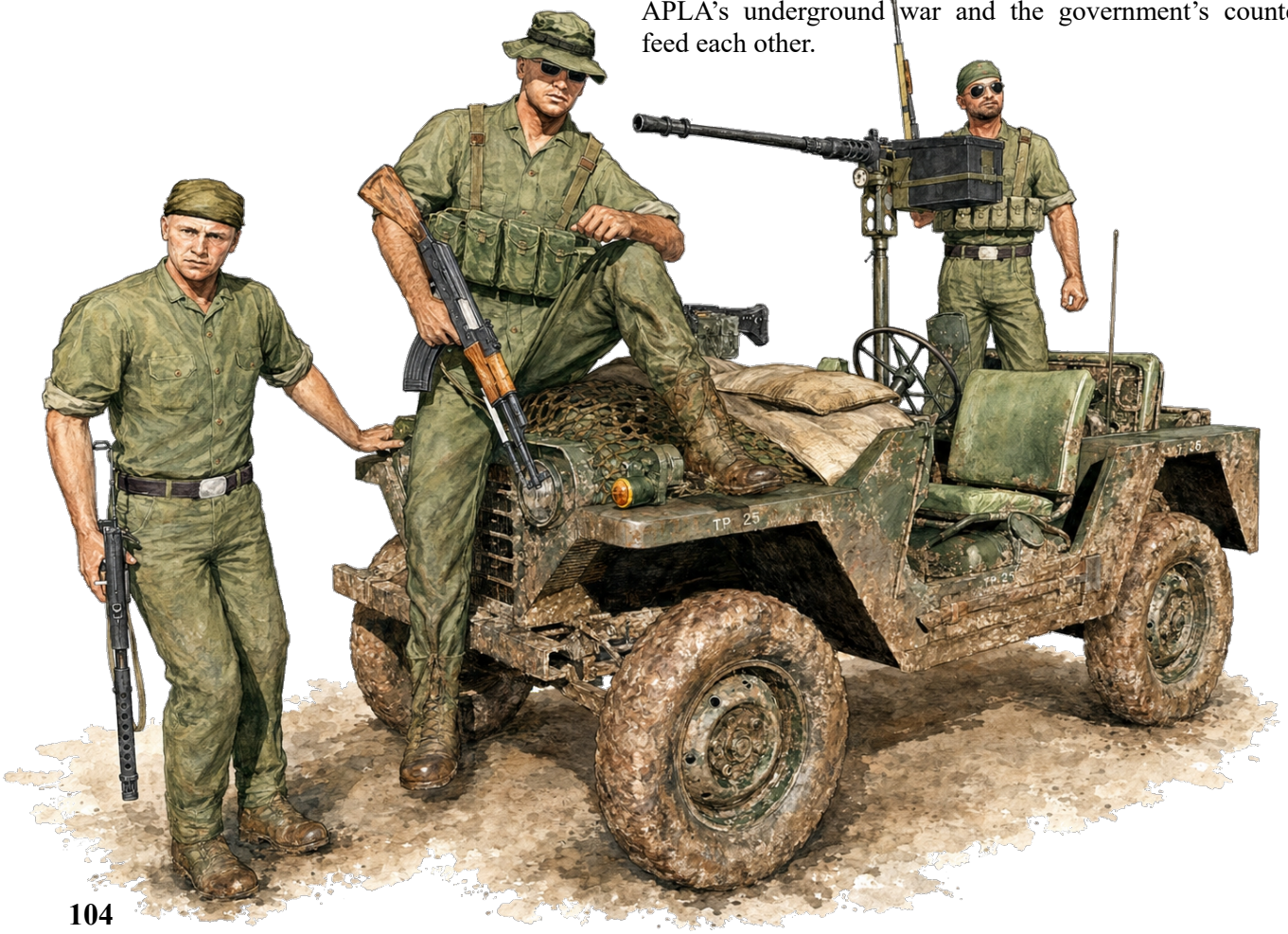
The Red Terror

The APLA's war is not defined only by propaganda, underground organization, and attacks on military targets. In southern Altis, the movement also becomes associated with intimidation, reprisals, and political violence — a campaign its enemies describe as the Red Terror. The roots of this violence lie in the brutalization of the southern war: government raids, arrests, torture, disappearances, and collective punishment harden the APLA's attitude toward anyone seen as serving the regime.

APLA militants increasingly treat police officers, informants, local officials, and collaborators as legitimate targets. In towns and villages, urban guerrillas conduct assassinations, ambushes, and attacks on police patrols. Officials connected to the junta, members of the Vigilance Bureau, prison staff, local administrators, and suspected informants may be shot, bombed, or abducted. These operations are intended to weaken local government control and make collaboration dangerous.

Mine warfare is one of the most feared parts of this campaign. Roads used by patrols, supply trucks, and police vehicles can be seeded with mines or improvised explosive devices, forcing government forces to move slowly and cautiously. These attacks are effective against convoys, but they also carry a heavy civilian cost: farmers, bus passengers, repair crews, and villagers using the same roads can be killed or wounded long after the intended target has passed.

By 1984, the Red Terror has become both a weapon and a burden for the APLA. It allows the movement to strike at the junta where open battle is impossible, but it also stains its claim to represent the oppressed. In the south, violence by one side rarely remains unanswered by the other, creating a cycle of reprisals in which the APLA's underground war and the government's counterinsurgency feed each other.



Freedom and Independence Army

The FIA is the ideological successor to the armed organization first formed during the crisis of 1949, when fear of left-wing movements became one of the defining forces in Altian politics. By the time of the civil war, this legacy has been reshaped into a smaller, harder, and better-armed movement tied closely to the property, political interests, and personal networks of the Vakardis family.

Fanatically anti-communist and deeply nationalist, the FIA rejects any compromise with the left. Its members see themselves not as rebels in the usual sense, but as defenders of Altian national order against revolution, foreign influence, and political weakness. This makes the movement hostile not only to armed left-wing groups, but also to officials and factions it considers too willing to bargain, retreat, or centralize power at the expense of its own networks.

The break with the junta in 1980 transforms the FIA from a loyalist formation into an independent armed faction. Many of its fighters come from the former 5th Brigade and National Guard structures, giving the movement access to trained personnel, combat experience, and a culture of harsh counterinsurgency. Its visual identity also reflects this inheritance: ERDL camouflage, Western weapons, and methods first developed within the government's own security apparatus remain common among FIA fighters.

Although limited in numbers, the FIA is well armed and financially resilient. Its close links with the AFMC give it access to outside support, while arms trafficking and black-market networks provide money, weapons, and supplies. These channels allow the movement to survive after its split from the regime and continue operating even when deprived of formal state backing.

The FIA does not avoid terror when dealing with its enemies. Left-wing activists, suspected sympathizers, local organizers, and political opponents may be threatened, abducted, or killed. For the movement, such violence is not a breakdown of discipline, but part of its understanding of war: a struggle in which compromise with the left is treated as betrayal and political cleansing as a necessary act of national defence.

The Arms Network

The FIA's strength does not come from numbers alone. Much of its power rests on a network of dealers, smugglers, port officials, former officers, businessmen, and foreign contacts that allows the movement to keep weapons, fuel, medicine, and other supplies moving across Altis. This network predates the open split with the junta and is closely tied to the political and commercial interests that once supported the 5th Brigade.

The movement's relationship with the AFMC gives it access to weapons and equipment that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. Some supplies arrive through direct channels, while others pass through intermediaries, private traders, commercial fronts, or ports officially controlled by the government. Even where the FIA does not directly control a harbor, old connections, bribery, intimidation, and sympathetic officials allow its cargoes to move through inspection, be misdeclared, or quietly disappear from official oversight.

The FIA is also deeply involved in the island's shadow trade in fuel, medicine, and humanitarian aid. Relief supplies, black-market goods, and military cargo often pass through overlapping channels, making it difficult to separate political logistics from criminal commerce. Through secret warehouses, trusted transporters, and local brokers, the movement can reward allies, sustain its fighters, and strengthen its influence over communities and armed groups dependent on access to scarce goods.

The scale of this network is visible in the weapons circulating across the government side of the war. Modern rifles, older surplus arms, ammunition, and foreign equipment found in the hands of Territorial Defence units and National Guard veterans often reflect the same supply routes that later sustain the FIA. By 1984, the movement's presence in the island's underground economy is unmistakable: it may be small as a military force, but it has the means to arm, supply, and destabilize entire regions.

Political Intimidation

The FIA understands the political value of violence better than most armed groups on Altis. Built around weapons, money, and old security networks, the movement treats armed force not only as a battlefield tool, but as a means of producing information, obedience, hunger, and fear. A rifle can guard a convoy, but it can also close a market, silence a witness, or force a village to choose sides.

Its intimidation campaign relies on mobility and uncertainty. FIA fighters can enter a settlement, strike a selected target, and disappear before local forces are able to respond. Moving in civilian vehicles and using disguise, bribery, forged papers, or old contacts at checkpoints, small groups are able to cross areas that should, in theory, be closed to them.

The targets of FIA intimidation are usually political enemies rather than random civilians. Left-wing activists, suspected sympathizers, organizers, informants, former rivals, and officials considered hostile to the movement may all be threatened, abducted, beaten, or killed. The purpose is not only to remove individuals, but to send a message to everyone around them: cooperation with the wrong side carries a price.

Much of this capability comes from the movement's origins in counterinsurgency. Many FIA members have experience in surveillance, raids, interrogations, and the identification of underground networks. Skills once used in the service of the junta become tools of an independent faction, allowing the FIA to find people, pressure families, and reach targets far beyond its visible area of control.

Professional Cadre

The FIA's greatest military asset is not its size, but the quality of its core personnel. Many of its fighters have long records of service in the National Guard and the former 5th Brigade, with years of direct combat experience behind them. This background gives the movement a professional cadre unlike that of most irregular forces on Altis.

When the FIA moves into illegal and semi-clandestine activity, it does not lose its combat effectiveness. Its fighters are already accustomed to operating in small groups, moving through hostile territory, gathering information, and striking selected targets with limited support. The transition from official counterinsurgency work to independent underground warfare changes their political status, but not their practical skills.

FIA fighters are trained for sabotage, targeted killings, ambushes, raids, and the creation of hidden arms caches. They know how to study terrain, identify weak points, use civilian movement as cover, and disappear before larger forces can respond. Their methods are often harsh, but disciplined: each action is intended to produce a specific military or political result.

By 1984, this professional cadre makes the FIA far more dangerous than its numbers suggest. The movement cannot fight the AAF or larger insurgent groups in open battle for long, but it does not need to. Its strength lies in precision, adaptation, and the ability to turn the skills of a former security formation into the tools of a clandestine war.

Armed Forces of the Midland Coalition

The Armed Forces of the Midland Coalition are a modern, highly mobile expeditionary force designed for rapid deployment beyond the coalition's own borders. Unlike armies built primarily for territorial defence, the AFMC are structured around overseas operations, combined arms coordination, and the ability to concentrate professional forces at short notice.

Their motto, Alterius Non Sit Qui Suus Esse Potest, reflects the political and military culture of the coalition: a belief in self-reliance, independent action, and the right to defend coalition interests without waiting for outside approval. Although often described by foreign observers as a NATO proxy, the AFMC are not simply an extension of another alliance's policy. They serve the security and economic interests of the Midland Coalition itself, especially in conflicts where direct NATO involvement would be politically impossible or strategically inconvenient.

The strength of the AFMC lies in the integration of its forces. Reserve infantry, mountain rifle troops, mechanized formations, military police, reconnaissance units, and aviation assets are expected to operate as parts of a single system rather than as isolated branches. This makes the coalition force especially dangerous during the opening phase of an intervention, when speed, coordination, and the rapid seizure of key terrain can decide the shape of the campaign.

On the ground, AFMC units are trained to move quickly, secure landing areas, protect supply routes, and bring mechanized combat power forward before an opponent can fully react. In the air, the coalition's aviation corps provides reconnaissance, strike capability, transport, and close support, allowing ground commanders to act with a level of mobility and confidence unavailable to most local forces on Altis.

By 1984, the AFMC represent one of the most capable outside military actors in the region. Their forces are smaller than those of a major alliance army, but better prepared for limited wars, expeditionary operations, and politically sensitive interventions. In Altis, this makes them not merely foreign supporters of one side, but a potential invading force with its own objectives, doctrine, and strategic timetable.

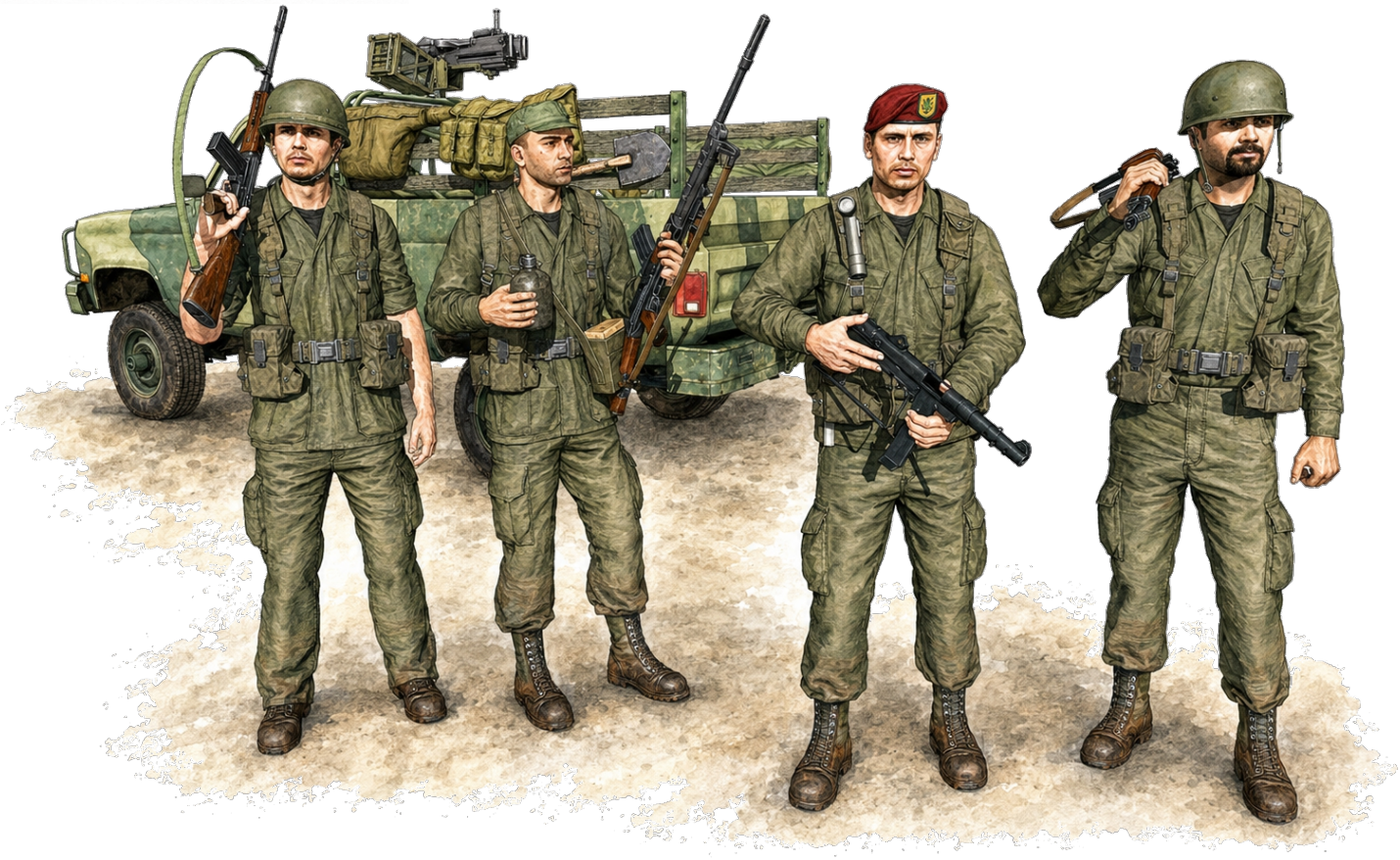
3rd Reserve Infantry Brigade

The 3rd Reserve Infantry Brigade is considered a second-line formation by the standards of the professional AFMC, but the designation should not be mistaken for limited combat value. Its battalions are trained to operate alongside regular infantry, mechanized troops, aviation, and supporting arms, allowing the brigade to take part in combined assaults rather than serving only as a static security force.

The brigade is capable of rapid deployment and can conduct helicopter-borne insertions when required. Its units may secure landing zones, reinforce threatened sectors, protect supply routes, or support regular formations during larger operations. Although its reservists require more time to assemble than standing troops, established procedures and professional command personnel allow the formation to become operational quickly after mobilization.

The permanent core of the brigade consists of serving officers and military specialists, including engineers, combat engineers, medics, artillery observers, and air-support controllers. These professionals provide command, technical expertise, and continuity, while the majority of the rank and file are former servicemen recalled under mobilization orders. This structure allows the AFMC to expand its field strength without creating an entirely improvised force.

Reserve infantrymen are primarily armed with 7.62×51mm battle rifles, particularly FAL-pattern weapons, although M14 rifles also remain in service. Once mobilized and integrated with their professional command and support elements, the troops of the 3rd Reserve Infantry Brigade form a capable combat formation rather than a conventional militia.



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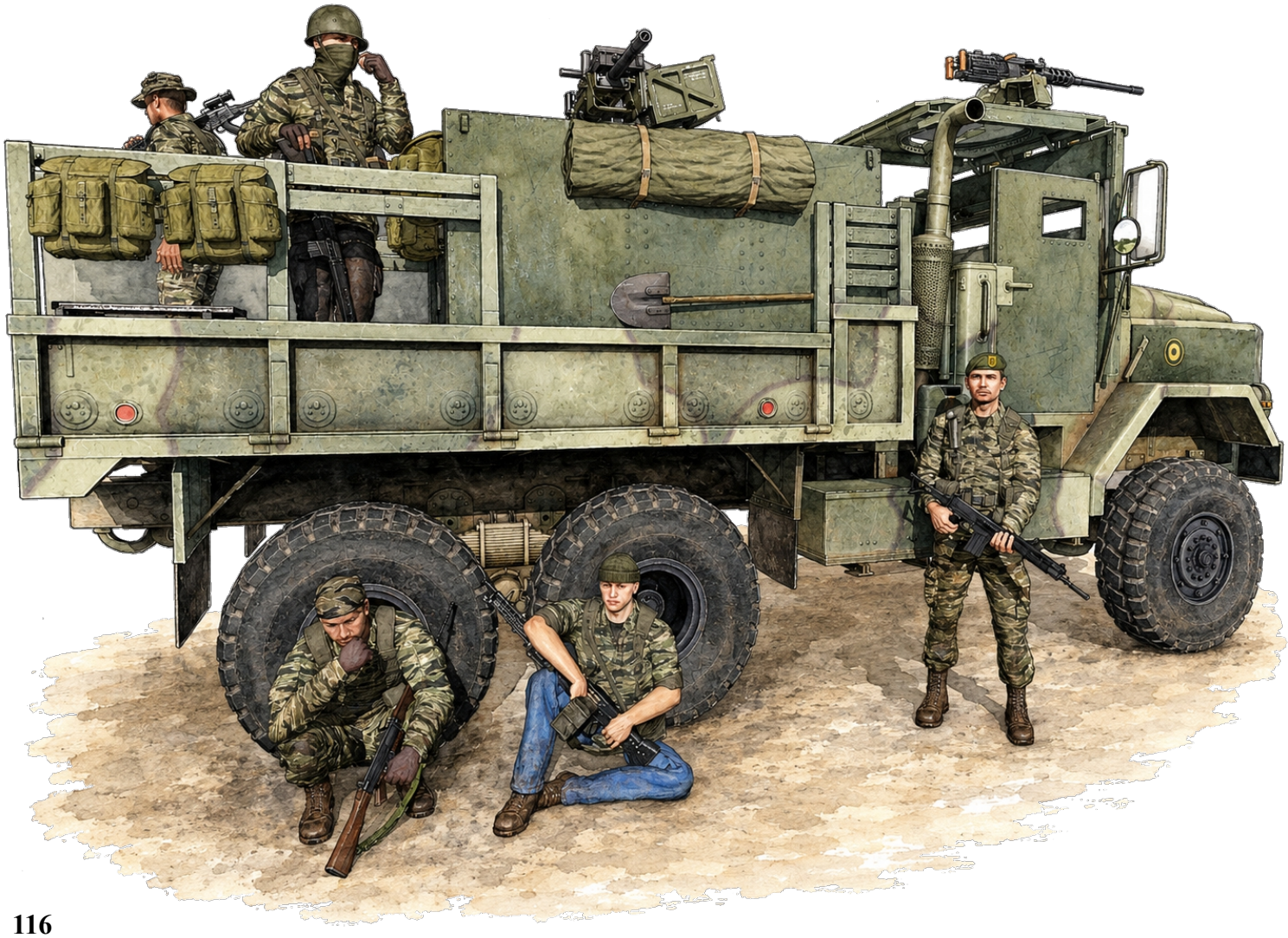
7th Mountain Rifle Brigade

The 7th Mountain Rifle Brigade is a highly professional light infantry formation specializing in operations across mountains, hills, and other broken terrain. Its organization favors smaller tactical elements than those used by most regular AFMC formations, but intensive training and modern equipment make these units dangerous well beyond their traditional operating environment.

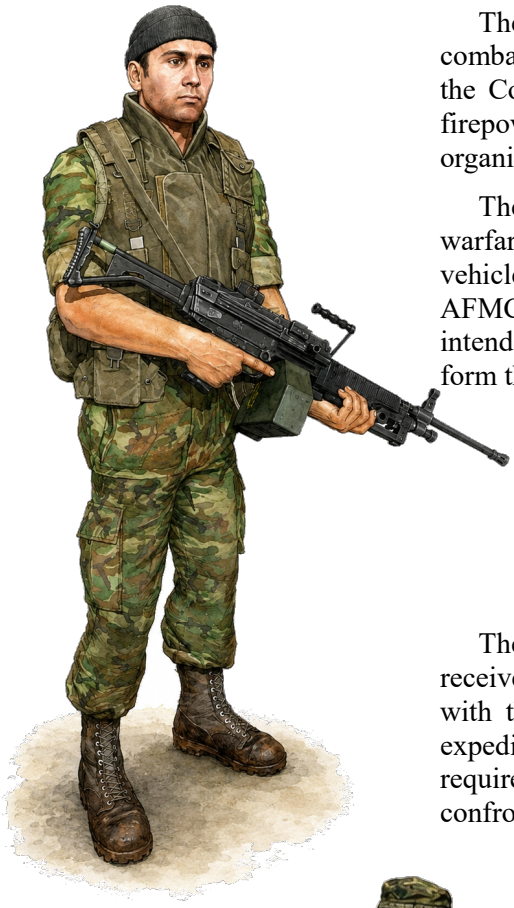
Mountain rifle troops are trained to deploy crew-served weapons quickly, move by helicopter, and engage targets at extended ranges. Their commanders place particular emphasis on observation, fieldcraft, and the careful use of dominant ground. Whether operating from a ridgeline, a concealed valley position, or open terrain, the brigade seeks to turn the surrounding landscape into a tactical advantage.

The brigade is distinguished by its Tigerstripe camouflage and green berets. It is also the first AFMC formation to receive the M47 Dragon anti-tank guided missile. In skilled hands, even a small fire-support section equipped with these weapons can threaten armored vehicles and delay forces far heavier than itself.

The 7th Mountain Rifle Brigade is also the only major AFMC formation to adopt the M14A1 rifle. Combined with its long-range training, mobile support weapons, and helicopter-borne capability, this gives the brigade a distinctive combat identity: light enough to deploy rapidly, but sufficiently well armed to fight effectively against both infantry and mechanized opponents.



2nd Mechanized Brigade



The 2nd Mechanized Brigade is the AFMC's principal formation for combat against conventional enemy forces. Designed with the battlefields of the Cold War in mind, it combines mobility, protection, and concentrated firepower, allowing it to advance rapidly, exploit breakthroughs, and engage organized opponents before they can establish a stable defensive line.

The brigade reflects contemporary Western concepts of mechanized warfare. Its infantry is trained to fight in close cooperation with armored vehicles, tanks, artillery, aviation, and supporting units from across the AFMC. Rather than operating as an isolated heavy formation, the brigade is intended to reinforce other coalition forces, provide mobile fire support, and form the armored core of larger combined operations.

Its infantry is distinguished by ERDL camouflage, modern Western protective equipment, 5.56×45mm weapons, and black berets shared with AFMC armored crews. This equipment reflects the brigade's role in sustained high-intensity combat, where communications, individual protection, and the rapid movement of infantry under armor are considered essential.

The brigade is also the first foreign formation to operate the LAV-25, received by the AFMC in 1983—the same year the vehicle entered service with the United States Marine Corps. Fast, heavily armed, and suited to expeditionary deployment, the LAV-25 gives the brigade the mobility required to support lighter formations while retaining enough firepower to confront enemy armor and fortified positions.

7th Mountain Rifle Brigade Reconnaissance Battalion

The reconnaissance battalion of the 7th Mountain Rifle Brigade is capable of performing missions far beyond conventional battlefield reconnaissance. Its detachments operate ahead of the main force, identifying routes, surveying landing zones, preparing bridgeheads, and gathering the information required for larger AFMC deployments.

The battalion is also trained for sabotage, deep operations, and attacks against command, communications, and logistical targets in the enemy rear. Its teams can infiltrate by helicopter or move overland with minimal support, remaining concealed until the moment of action. Light armament limits their ability to sustain prolonged combat, but gives them the mobility needed to strike quickly and disengage before heavier forces can respond.

Counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare form another important part of the battalion's role. Its personnel can locate guerrilla networks, conduct long-range patrols, organize intelligence collection, and train friendly local forces operating alongside the AFMC. This allows small reconnaissance teams to extend coalition influence into areas where the permanent deployment of regular troops would be difficult or politically undesirable.

Highly mobile, professionally trained, and able to operate with considerable independence, the battalion can create disorder far behind an opponent's front line. Whether facing a modern conventional army or an insurgent movement in a developing country, its detachments seek to disrupt communications, expose vulnerable positions, and prepare the ground for the arrival of the main force.

Military Police

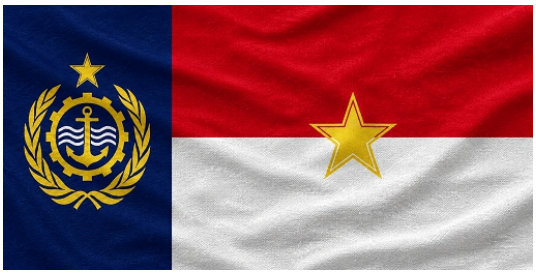
The AFMC Military Police are responsible for maintaining order in rear areas and settlements placed under coalition authority. They are not intended to operate as a front-line combat formation. Their task is to establish the controlled environment required for deployed AFMC units, military administration, and local civilian institutions to function.

Military Police personnel organize checkpoints, roadblocks, patrol routes, and controlled access points around populated areas. They regulate the movement of civilians, military vehicles, supply convoys, and commercial traffic, inspect documents and cargoes, and prevent unauthorized movement through restricted zones. These duties are particularly important during the early stages of an intervention, when territorial control remains uncertain and established administrative systems may no longer function.

Work with the local population forms another major part of their role. Military Police patrols maintain contact with civilian officials, investigate security incidents, enforce curfews and movement restrictions, and collect reports of suspicious activity. They also search for signs of hostile infiltration, concealed weapons, or underground networks operating inside settlements under AFMC control.

The Military Police process detainees, conduct identity checks, and carry out initial questioning before transferring prisoners to the appropriate military, intelligence, or civilian authority. Their purpose is to distinguish civilians and displaced persons from suspected combatants, infiltrators, and members of hostile organizations. Information obtained during these procedures is recorded and passed to the relevant AFMC services rather than independently exploited by Military Police units.

Their authority also extends to coalition personnel. Military Police regulate military traffic, investigate breaches of discipline, detain servicemen suspected of offences, and enforce military regulations throughout the rear area. They remain within their assigned jurisdiction and rarely accompany maneuver formations beyond it, concentrating instead on maintaining order in territory already secured by the AFMC.



Malden Expeditionary Corps

The Malden Expeditionary Corps is a mobile combined-arms force organized for rapid intervention by sea and air. Its units are trained to seize ports, airfields, and coastal approaches, establish bridgeheads, and sustain operations beyond Malden's own territory. Amphibious landings, helicopter assaults, and the rapid concentration of light and mechanized forces form the basis of its expeditionary doctrine.

Malden's political turn toward the Eastern Bloc in 1968 reshapes the Corps without completely erasing its earlier military traditions. French and American weapons already in service remain in use, while Soviet and Czechoslovak equipment is gradually introduced into the regular formations. By 1984, the MEC reflects both periods of Malden's history rather than belonging entirely to either military system.

This mixed inheritance is especially visible in its heavy equipment. PT-76 amphibious tanks operate alongside M48s, while the aviation arm combines Mi-24 gunships, UH-1 Huey helicopters, and C-119 Flying Boxcar transports. The resulting force is logistically complex, but it gives Malden a wide range of capabilities suited to maritime operations, airborne movement, fire support, and the rapid deployment of troops across the region.

Almost all of Malden's deployable combat forces are grouped under a single command, the Corps Expéditionnaire de Malden. At its core are marine formations trained to fight from ships, aircraft, and temporary forward bases. Reserve troops, regular marine infantry, assault units, reconnaissance commandos, armor, and aviation are expected to operate as parts of one expeditionary system. Internal security and political control remain the responsibility of a separate state service outside the Corps command structure.

The Corps is not maintained solely for the defence of Malden itself. It serves as the principal instrument of Maldenese influence in Mediterranean regional politics, allowing the government to support allies, protect sea routes, secure strategic facilities, and intervene in crises before larger powers can impose their own solutions. Its deployments therefore combine military objectives with the wider political interests of the Maldenese state.

By 1984, the MEC is neither a conventional Eastern Bloc formation nor a remnant of Malden's former Western alignment. It is an independent expeditionary force shaped by both traditions: centralized, marine-oriented, and equipped to move quickly from political pressure to direct military intervention.

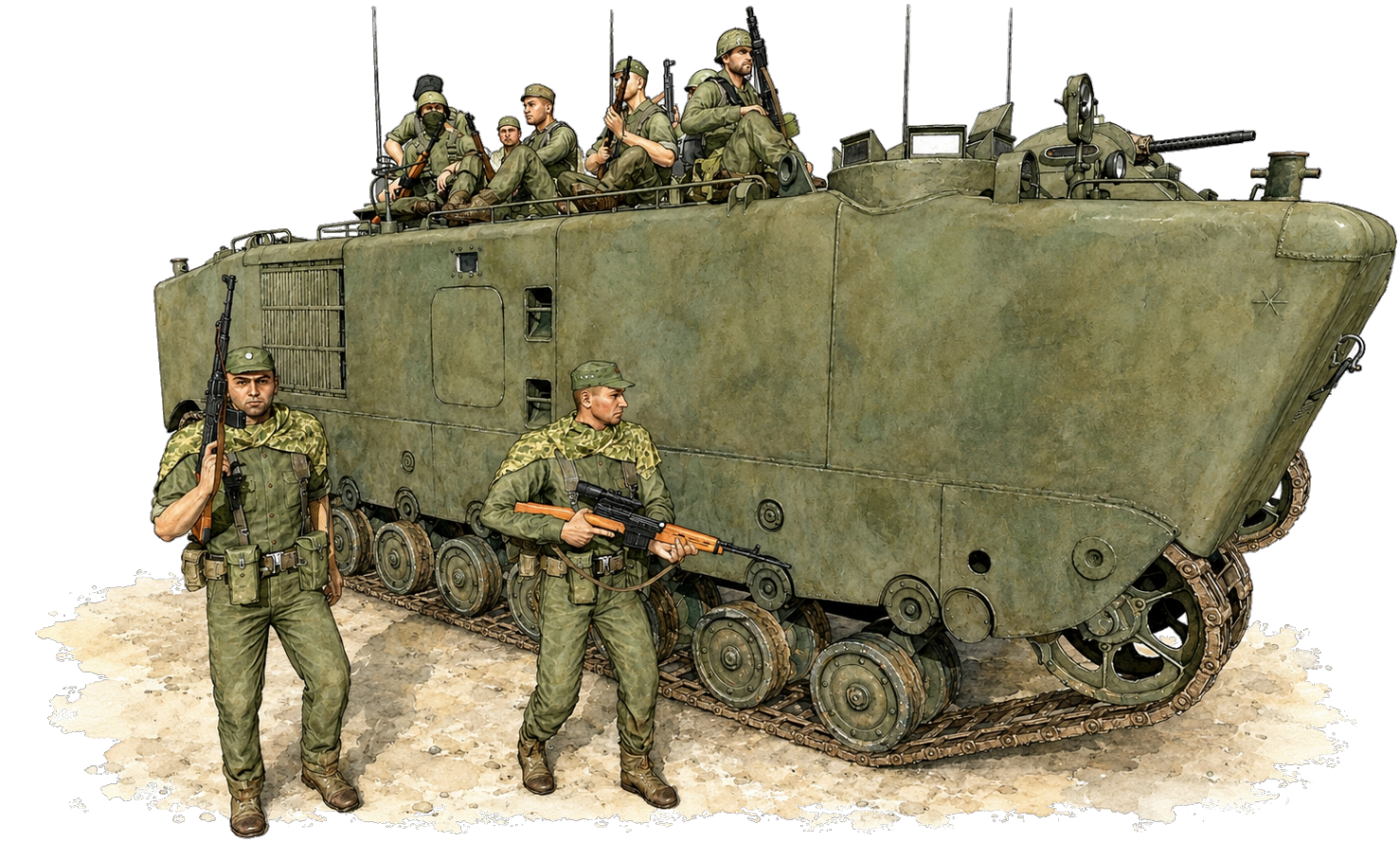
Marine Reserve

The *Réserve Territoriale des Troupes de Marine* forms the second-line component of the *Corps Expéditionnaire de Malden*. Its units reinforce regular marines, secure landing zones and established bridgeheads, protect supply routes, and hold positions already taken by the leading assault formations. Although less heavily equipped than the Corps' regular forces, the reserve remains an organized military formation rather than a civilian militia.

Reserve units are trained to operate alongside the other elements of the Corps. During amphibious operations, they can follow the first assault waves, expand the secured perimeter, clear nearby settlements, and release regular marine infantry for further offensive action. Once ashore, they provide manpower for defensive positions, patrols, and rear-area security while remaining capable of supporting larger combined operations.

Their armament reflects both Malden's earlier Western alignment and its post-war procurement policy. MAS-49/56 self-loading rifles and older MAS-36 rifles remain common, alongside American M1 rifles and M2 carbines. Reserve formations also retain large stocks of StG 44 assault rifles acquired by the Maldenese government shortly after the war. This mixture is dated by the standards of the Corps' first-line units, but the weapons remain serviceable and are available in sufficient numbers to equip mobilized personnel.

The most distinctive equipment used by the reserve is the aging LVTP-5 amphibious carrier. Large and increasingly obsolete, these vehicles still allow troops and supplies to move directly from ship to shore while providing limited armored protection and fire support. In the hands of the *Réserve Territoriale*, the LVTP-5 remains useful for reinforcing beachheads and sustaining the Corps during the vulnerable first stages of an amphibious deployment.



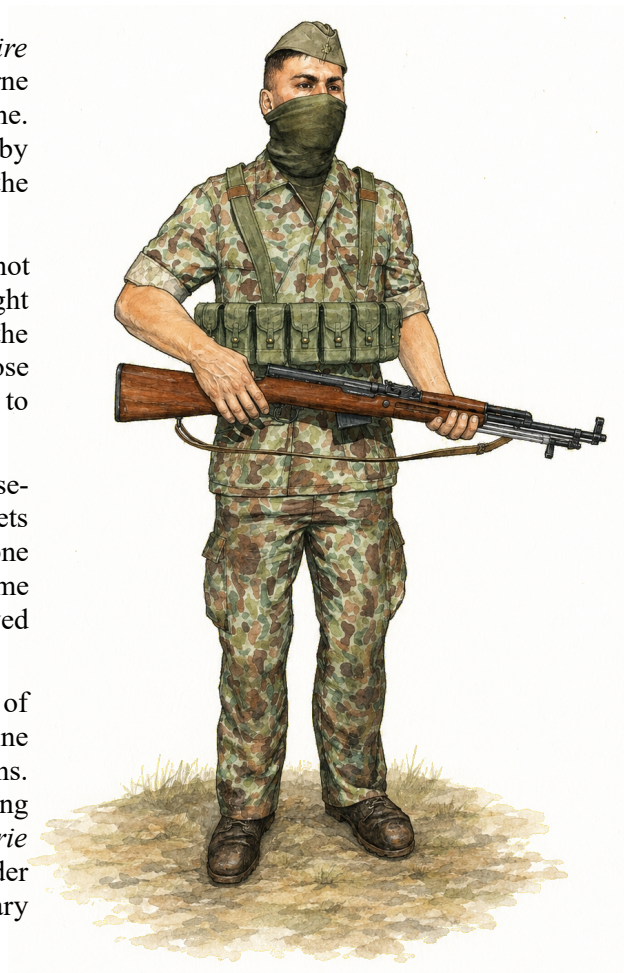
Marine Infantry

The + forms the principal first-line infantry of the *Corps Expéditionnaire de Malden*. Its units are trained for amphibious landings, helicopter-borne movement, and sustained operations beyond the immediate coastal zone. Once a bridgehead has been established, the marines expand it, seize nearby roads and settlements, and continue the advance in cooperation with the Corps' armored, artillery, and aviation elements.

Although built around marine traditions, the *Infanterie de Marine* is not limited to fighting on beaches. Its units can operate as conventional light infantry across hills, farmland, and urban terrain while retaining the flexibility required for rapid embarkation and redeployment. Close coordination with supporting arms allows relatively light formations to conduct attacks that would otherwise require much heavier forces.

Regular marines wear Maldenese frog-skin camouflage with Chinese-pattern chest rigs and Soviet-style load-bearing equipment. SSh-60 helmets and field caps are commonly worn in combat, while black berets remain one of the recognizable symbols of the Corps. Their appearance reflects the same transition visible throughout the MEC: French military traditions preserved beneath increasingly strong Eastern Bloc influence.

Their armament is centered on 7.62×39mm assault rifles and carbines of Soviet, Czechoslovak, and Polish manufacture, supported by light machine guns, rifle grenades, RPG-7 launchers, and portable anti-aircraft weapons. Operating with armored personnel carriers, BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles, amphibious armor, artillery, and the Corps' aviation, the *Infanterie de Marine* provides the link between the first landing and the wider campaign inland. It is the formation around which most MEC expeditionary operations are built.



Marine Shock Troops

The *Troupes de Choc de Marine* are the principal assault element of the *Corps Expéditionnaire de Malden*. They spearhead amphibious and helicopter-borne landings, attack fortified positions, and seize objectives whose rapid capture is essential to the wider operation. Ports, airfields, command posts, road junctions, and defended urban areas are among their typical targets.

Unlike the regular *Infanterie de Marine*, these troops are intended for concentrated, close-range combat rather than prolonged operations across a broad front. They can form the first assault wave, reinforce a stalled landing, or serve as the Corps' mobile reserve when a defensive position must be broken or a threatened sector recovered. Their operations rely heavily on coordination with armor, artillery, helicopters, and supporting aircraft.

The *Troupes de Choc* wear the same Maldenese frog-skin camouflage as other first-line marines, but are distinguished by Soviet-pattern body armor and a greater use of SSh-68 helmets. Their red beret is a source of considerable pride: earning the right to wear it requires completing an intensive training course and passing a demanding selection process for service in an assault unit. The additional protection reflects their expected role in direct attacks, where mobility is deliberately exchanged for greater survivability.

Their infantry weapons are centered on assault rifles of Soviet, Czechoslovak, and Polish manufacture; carbines are not normally issued. Machine guns, grenade launchers, anti-tank weapons, and precision rifles give each assault group the firepower needed to fight independently during the opening stages of an attack. Within the MEC, the *Troupes de Choc de Marine* are the formation used when speed alone is insufficient and an objective must be taken by force.

Reconnaissance and Action Commandos

The *Commandos de Reconnaissance et d'Action* are the principal special-operations element of the *Corps Expéditionnaire de Malden*. They operate ahead of the main force, gathering information on enemy positions, routes, coastal approaches, and potential landing zones. Their reports help determine where the Corps will land, which objectives must be struck first, and how regular formations will be committed.

Commando teams are granted wide operational independence and are expected to remain effective beyond direct contact with higher command. They can infiltrate by sea, helicopter, or overland routes, establish concealed observation posts, and operate for extended periods in enemy-controlled territory. Their task is not merely to observe, but to coordinate the wider reconnaissance effort and convert scattered information into usable intelligence for the Corps headquarters.

The *Commandos de Reconnaissance et d'Action* also conduct sabotage and raids against communications, headquarters, supply points, air-defence positions, and transport infrastructure. Working behind enemy lines, they can disrupt preparations, misdirect reserves, and create openings for amphibious or airborne assault forces. Their equipment is selected according to the mission rather than a rigid standard loadout, allowing small teams to combine reconnaissance, demolition, and direct-action capabilities.

Unlike the frog-skin uniforms of the regular marines, the commandos wear the distinctive leopard camouflage pattern, usually with lightweight field equipment suited to concealment and independent movement. Within the MEC, they provide the link between intelligence and direct intervention: identifying the enemy's weak points, preparing the battlefield, and striking before the main force arrives.

Committee Security Service

The Service de Sûreté du Comité is Malden's principal political-security organization and operates outside the command structure of the *Corps Expéditionnaire*. Reporting directly to the state authorities, it is responsible for counter-subversion, political surveillance, and the protection of the government against internal opposition and foreign intelligence activity. Although represented alongside MEC forces in the field, it is not a marine formation.

On Malden, the Service monitors political organizations, investigates suspected sabotage, and maintains files on individuals considered potentially disloyal. Its personnel cultivate informants, conduct searches and arrests, and question detainees before transferring them to the appropriate civil or military authorities. Its influence extends into ports, transport services, government institutions, and other sectors considered essential to national security.

During an overseas intervention, detachments of the *Service de Sûreté* follow the combat forces into secured territory. They register local officials, inspect documents, screen prisoners and displaced civilians, and identify possible resistance networks. By combining interrogation, local informants, and records seized from police stations or administrative offices, the Service seeks to establish political control behind the advancing military front.

Service personnel wear restrained uniforms and field caps rather than marine camouflage, and are armed primarily with AK-pattern and vz. 58 rifles. They commonly travel in ordinary utility vehicles, allowing small teams to move between checkpoints, administrative offices, and detention sites without requiring military transport. Their purpose is not to win ground in battle, but to ensure that territory taken by the MEC can be controlled once the fighting has moved on.

Third World Troubles

Volume I

In 1984, Altis stands at the end of a war that has lasted almost a decade. The military junta claims that order has been restored, but the island remains divided by underground resistance, exhausted armed forces, foreign influence, and the threat of direct intervention.

This volume traces the modern history of Altis from the aftermath of the Second World War to the final months of the civil war. Political rivalry, military rule, insurgency, foreign arms, and the growth of a wartime economy gradually transform the island into one of the most unstable points in the Mediterranean.

Alongside the historical narrative, the book presents the principal armed factions of the conflict, their organization, uniforms, equipment, and methods of warfare. More than a conventional unit guide, it is an illustrated military history of a fictional Cold War crisis, written as if it had been published inside its own world.

Third World Troubles: Altis 1984 is the companion volume to the Arma 3 modification of the same name. Together, the book and the mod offer two views of the same conflict: one through documents, photographs, and military plates, and the other from the ground, where its final outcome remains undecided.